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MR. HOGARTH'S WILL.

BY

CATHERINE HELEN SPENCE,

AUTHOR OF "CLARA MORRISON," "TENDER AND TRUE,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MR. HOGARTH'S WILL.

CHAPTER I.

MR. BRANDON'S SECOND PROPOSAL TO ELSIE, AND ITS FATE.

On Mr. Brandon's arrival at Melbourne after a longer voyage than he had expected in a ship with such a high character as the one he sailed in, he hurried up to Barragong, and was much gratified to find things there did not look so badly as he had been led to expect. It was his overseer's want of confidence in himself that had made him exaggerate everything that was going wrong, or was likely to go wrong. In fact Mr. Phillips's affairs were suffering much more from the want of the master's eye than his; but Dr. Grant had a better opinion of his own manage-

ment, and wrote more cheerful accounts. Brandon regretted that Powell had left his employment, for if he had been in charge of Barragong there might have been three more happy months in England for his master.

As his affairs were really in a sufficiently satisfactory state, he felt that he must write to Elsie Melville, renewing his offer of marriage, and endeavouring as far as he could to give her confidence in the stability of his character. How exceedingly awkward he felt it to be to have to write this instead of saying it. How incomparably better such things are done by word of mouth, particularly when one is not a ready and clever letter-writer. He would in the personal interview have felt the effect of one sentence before he ventured on another—he would have assisted his halting phrases by all the advantages of tone, gesture, and expression of countenance. Though he had failed once in his attempt to win her affections, he had been far more stupid than he was now, and he was now more anxious for success. The more he had thought over the

person, the manners, and the character of Elsie Melville, the more convinced he was that she was the one woman in the world for him; but he was by no means so sanguine of being accepted as he had been, particularly when he had only the pen to trust to. There was no saying what so clever and so literary a girl as Elsie Melville was would think of his blundering declaration. The paper looked cold and blank and uninviting —it really was hard to make it the only means of telling her how much he loved her. No kind wishes towards the overseer whose fears and scruples had hurried him away, or towards Miss Phillips, who had interrupted him when he was about to say something he had hoped Elsie could not mistake, accompanied the half-dozen different attempts at a love-letter, which were written before he could please himself. Emily was his friend; Jane, he thought, would be his friend too. Elsie was really a kind-hearted girl, and if he could only convince her that he would be miserable if she refused him, she might pity him a little. He had not the same objections to

a little pity that she had on that day in the railway carriage, when he had been so confident of success. But when he reflected on what Peggy might have said with truth about him, and when he put to that the fact that immediately after his refusal by Elsie he had devoted himself to Miss Phillips, there was no doubt that Elsie had some cause to suspect the steadiness of his principles. It was difficult by writing to hint at these things without saying too much, but they must not be passed over in silence either.

At last the letter was written and committed to the country post-office nearest to Barragong—not that he was satisfied with it, but he must not lose the mail. If she was good enough to accept of him, she was to draw upon him for a specified sum for passage-money and outfit, and come out in the mail steamer following her answer. It was not a brilliant letter, but it was honest and straightforward. However, as Elsie had sailed for Melbourne before it reached England, it was of the less consequence what it was.

Pending her answer, Brandon felt very un-

settled. He could not set himself to work systematically, and all the neighbours said that his visit to England had spoiled him for a colonist, as it did with most people. He missed his pleasantest neighbour, Mr. Phillips, and he missed the children. Though Dr. Grant in one direction, and Mr. M'Intyre in another, thought they were ten times better than the Phillipses, Brandon did not feel that they could make up to him for their absence.

Dr. Grant was certainly mismanaging, to a considerable extent, Mr. Phillips's business, and muddling it as he did his own affairs. He had now been many years in the sheep-farming line, and in the best of times, for he had bought very cheap—much cheaper than either Phillips or Brandon, and he had quite as large a capital to start with; but he had a bad way of managing the men on his stations; he gave the same wages as other people, certainly, for he could not help that, but he always gave them with a grudge, and seemed to think his employés were picking his pocket. He had a harsh and dictatorial way

of giving orders—very different from Brandon's and Phillips's pleasant manner—and he consequently had never been well served. His men had been the first to leave at the time of the diggings, and the consequences had been most disastrous. From sheer want of hands, he had sacrificed one of his runs with the sheep on it to Powell, and now he grudged to see how very handsomely Powell had been repaid for his money and time in this transaction. The fortune that Powell had made ought to have been his—Dr. Grant's own—instead of filling the pockets of a man who had only sprung from the ranks.

The same style of mismanagement was carried into Mr. Phillips's affairs; and yet when Brandon relieved Dr. Grant of the burden he had so unwillingly taken up, the latter felt rather hurt, for he had had a handsome salary for the charge of Wiriwilta and the other stations, and he would certainly miss the money; and, besides, he thought it showed a want of confidence in himself on Phillips's part.

At Wiriwilta, however, there was a feeling of

pleasure at the exchange, and Brandon had the satisfaction of really benefiting his friend without taking any very great deal of trouble.

In this restless state of his mind he had great pleasure in the society of Edgar, who attached himself to his uncle with quiet fidelity. He soon learned to ride, and to ride fearlessly and far; he learned too to use his limbs, his ears, and his eyes, so that Brandon found he really had a head on his shoulders, which he had been rather doubtful of when the lad had been kept so constantly at his books.

One day when the boy had been talking with enthusiasm of Australian life, and expressing his longing after more adventures, his uncle, who also was eager for change, proposed to Edgar an overland journey together to Adelaide. He had heard that some particularly fine sheep were to be had in South Australia, and he wished to add this variety to his own flocks as well as to those of Mr. Phillips. He had always had a great wish to see the Adelaide side, and this journey would amuse and employ him till he could get

his answer from Elsie. If she accepted him, and came out, as he wished, without delay, he might never have another opportunity for making the visit, for he would not be inclined to leave her, for a while at any rate.

Edgar was delighted with the proposal, and helped his uncle with the few simple preparations for their long ride with a vigour and despatch that showed he had the stuff in him for a good bushman. How his tender mother would have trembled at the thought of the perils and hardships of such a journey but as she knew nothing about it till it was safely over, she was spared all anxiety. Brandon was not altogether insincere when he told Elsie and the Edinburgh ladies that the finest prospect he ever saw in Victoria was the prospect of getting out of it, but the present pleasure made him forget many past ones. He had a real enjoyment in the bush life he then talked so contemptuously about. Camping out was to him no hardship, and to Edgar it was a delightful novelty. It was varied by nights spent at sheep stations, where a hospitable

welcome generally awaited them, and an amount of comfort varying according to circumstances. When they crossed the Victorian border, and came to the South Australian side, the welcome appeared to be equally hearty. Edgar Holmes could not help admiring the want of suspicion and the liberality of these absolute strangers.

Brandon went about his purchase of sheep on his way to Adelaide, and made what he thought a very satisfactory bargain. It was to be a joint speculation between himself and Mr. Phillips, and he was sure it would turn out very well. When he had left directions as to delivery, he and his nephew went down to Adelaide, to see what they thought of that little colonial capital. Edgar was charmed with Adelaide, and preferred it out-and-out to Melbourne, but as he had only passed through the latter, and had got acquainted with none of the people there, his preference was perhaps not worth much. Brandon, however, could not help confessing that the Adelaide men had some cause for the patriotism so strongly, and, as he

had thought, so tiresomely expressed at the time of the diggings. It had less bustle than Melbourne, and certainly was not so wealthy; but it was a quiet, cheap, and hospitable place, and its prosperity rested on a very solid basis. The amount of cultivation, both agricultural and horticultural, contrasted favourably with that of Melbourne, which had been almost exclusively pastoral till the gold diggings broke out, and had had many drawbacks, in the shape of land regulations, to its becoming a corn and wine bearing country.

Brandon took up his abode at the York Hotel, of course, and met with some pleasant people in and about Adelaide. Some of them he had known in London, and they introduced him to others. If his heart had not been fixed at this present time on Elsie Melville, he might have taken a fancy to one of the Adelaide girls whom he met. They were not so formidable in the array of their accomplishments and acquirements as the modern English young lady; they were frank, agreeable, and not ignorant of

domestic matters, and they had no apparent horror of the bush. But Brandon's affections were really engaged, and he put considerable restraint on his flirting powers during this visit, which all engaged men ought to do, but which, I must say, I have found very few engaged men do; they feel so perfectly safe themselves that they care very little for what construction other people may put on their attentions, or their polite speeches.

Brandon had sent directions for Mr. Talbot to get his letters and forward them to him in Adelaide, for he was now daily expecting Elsie's answer. In case of his being accepted, he would cross over to Melbourne in time to receive her from the next mail-steamer, would marry her there, and take her home to Barragong, and thus save himself two long land journeys.

But the mail-steamer had come with the Adelaide mails, and the next after that with his own letters, but not a word from Elsie or from any of the Phillipses. He had had a few lines from Emily the preceding month, to say that

dear little Eva was dead, and that they were all getting better. The address was either in Jane's handwriting or in Elsie's, but he took it for granted that it was Elsie's, and had treasured it up in consequence of that supposition. But this month there was not a word from any of them. There had been plenty of time for an answer, for his letter had been sent *viâ* Marseilles, so that Elsie had had ten days clear to make up her mind and reply to what she ought to have thought an important communication.

It was using him extremely ill to treat his letter with so much contempt. He was never more near being very angry in his life. It was strange that Elsie Melville, whose manner was so remarkably gentle and winning, should on two important occasions have treated him with such marked discourtesy. No doubt, his letter was not worth very much in itself; but to him it was of great consequence. If she wanted a month for consideration, why not write and tell him so? Or, if she feared to commit herself, she might have got Jane to write. Could she

have taken the fever? That was a solution—but a very sad one—of her conduct. Jane would have certainly written in that case if she had not got the fever too. He would alter his plans: he would go back overland; or, rather, he would sail up the Murray, and not pass through Melbourne at all. So he took his passage and Edgar's by one of the Murray steamers, and felt that if he was not a very ill-used man, he ought to feel a very unhappy one.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. PECK.

In a poor-looking room of a small wayside public-house, about twenty miles out of Adelaide, were seated one evening, shortly after Brandon's departure up the Murray, a man and a woman, neither of them young or handsome or respectable-looking. If they had been so once they had outgrown them all. The woman certainly had what is called the remains of a fine woman about her, but her face had so many marks of care, of evil passions, and of irregular living, that it was perhaps more repulsive than if it had been absolutely plain in features; her dress was slatternly and ill-fitting, her gray hair untidily gathered under a dingy black cap, with

bright, though soiled yellow flowers stuck in it; her eyes, which had still some brightness, had a fierce, hungry expression; and the very hands, thin and long, and with overgrown nails, had less the appearance of honest work than of dishonest rapacity. The man was a rougher-looking person, more blackguardly, perhaps, in appearance, but not so dangerous. He had been at the nearest post-office, and brought a letter addressed to Mrs. Peck, which the woman tore open and read with impatient eagerness.

"This is from Mr. Talbot at last," said the man. "Long looked for—come at last. I hopes as how it is worth waiting for."

"Worth waiting for!" said she, stamping on the letter with her foot, and standing up, with such a look of frenzy that her companion moved a little out of the way. "Hang him, and his clients too!"

"Won't this man come down with the ready, Liz? Does he send to make inquiries? A cool hand—cooler than the old man. Won't out with the blunt till he knows what he's paying for"

"It's not about him at all," said Mrs. Peck. "Not a word has he ever said, good or bad—taken no notice of my letters, no more nor if I had not been such a mother to him. I should have had an answer to my second letter by this time, and I know it was directed all right; he must have got them both. I'll have it out of him, though. I'll have my revenge, as sure as I am a living woman."

"Don't go into such a scot, woman. Then, if it is not from young Cross Hall, what has that lawyer said to put you into such a tantrum?"

"Oh! just a request to keep on this side of the border, or he'll not warrant my getting a farthing out of Phillips. He offers three pound a quarter more if I don't show my face in Melbourne! Such a beggarly sum it is after all! To think that I should only have two children, and them turning out such ungrateful cubs to me!"

"Two childen, Liz?" said the man with a sneer. "Well, if I was Phillips I'd like to

keep you at a civil distance just at present, for you look as like to brain him as not."

"There's the both of them rolling in wealth. Frank got all Cross Hall's property, and all through me; and Betsy, with her London establishment and her carriage, no doubt, and her children dressed like duchesses, and herself, too —and look at me!"

"Well, just look at you, Liz. I fancy that the sight of you would do them no credit. You're well enough off with Phillips. I think this is a very handsome offer. Though we're both sick of Adelaide, we can stop here a bit longer—at least, till we can see our way clear to get out of it."

"Do you think I don't care for my liberty? and I hate the Adelaide side. It was all your doings coming across here at all, and a precious mull you've made of it. I fancy they must be thinking of coming back to Melbourne, from this notice to me to keep out of the way. And do you think I don't want to see my own daughter?" Did not I put her in the way of

all her good fortune? Did not I dress her the day she first saw Phillips, and did not she look like a angel?"

"And he was spoon enough to marry her, which was more than either you or me expected. As for the girl, she was glad enough to go away from you; you never cared so much for her."

"Did I not, when I saw she was growing up so handsome and a credit to me?"

"Yes, yes; we both wanted to make our own of her, and I think we did not do amiss, considering," said Peck. "We've had bad luck in Adelaide, but things may change—money goes farther here."

"Money never goes far with us," said Mrs. Peck, "and Melbourne is the place where we can get on best. If I had Frank's money, which I must and shall get out of him somehow, we could manage to rub along here, but without it we never could. The black-hearted scoundrel, not to send me a farthing—me who could——"

"You had better threaten him with what you can do in your next letter. I always thought that style of working the oracle would pay best; but perhaps the motherly affectionate dodge was the best to try first. Threaten him in your next."

"I don't think I'll condescend to threaten him; I don't care to save him from what he deserves for his shameful ingratitude to me. I could make better terms with Cross Hall's nieces than I could do with Frank. Surely they would give me more for my secret than he would do to keep me quiet. They were left beggars, I know, and the estate is worth a great deal to them."

"Hang it, Mrs. Peck, that is a glorious idea, but don't be too hurried in your movements. You don't care about your own share in the business being known?" said Peck.

"I care for nothing if I could only get my revenge on him, and if I could only get as much out of the Melville girls as would allow me to snap my fingers at Phillips. I would rather

relish publishing my connection with him. I would like to bring down Betsy a peg."

"There's where you always make a mull of it, Liz. Your infernal temper always gets the better of you. Revenge and spite are very good things in their way, but I don't see that they pay. I think you would be very mad to give up so much a year for the pleasure of vexing Phillips and Betsy; and as for the Melville girls, how are you to get at them? There is not shot in the locker to take you to England, and letters are very risky things to write. You're sure to let out more than is safe, and if you let out too little the girls will see no advantage in it."

"I hate letters," said Mrs. Peck, moodily; "but I would like to get at the girls by word of mouth."

As this interesting pair were engaged in conversation, a traveller of a very different description alighted at the door of the inn, and requested lodgings for the night. He was well-dressed and respectable-looking; he was pro-

bably as old as either of them, but his face and air gave tokens of a quieter life and a calmer temper. His horse was knocked up, so that he could not go on to a larger and better-appointed inn than this, which was five miles nearer town; but when he saw the name over the door and the host and hostess, he was reconciled to the inferior accommodation. But he rather objected to the company that he found in the inn parlour, and did not seem pleased with the proposal that he should take supper with them.

"Oh, Mr. Dempster," said the host, "I fancy you have got nice since you were in England. These people are decent enough, I reckon, though rather down in their luck, like some others of us. I wish I had such a house to receive you in as that I built on the —— Road. I had plenty rooms there; but you see it was not licensed, and I was ruined—at least brought down to this."

"Well, Frankland, I suppose I must submit," said Mr. Dempster, "as you say you have no other place for me; but I never would have thought these were particularly decent people."

Whether from spiritual influences or not, Mr. Dempster felt a great repugnance to this man and woman. The influence might have been partly spirituous, for there was a considerable fragrance of strong liquor about them both.

In spite of the unpromising appearance of the house, the hostess produced a very tempting-looking supper for hungry people. She sat down herself to make tea for the company, and was delighted to see Mr. Dempster, and to have a little talk with him about old colonists and old times. She was a very old colonist herself, and had known many ups and downs, generally in the same line of life.

Active, civil, and much-enduring, she was an admirable hostess, but her husband was rather idle and speculative, and had invested the savings of many years in the erection of a large hotel in a place where, in the opinion of the Bench of Magistrates, it was not wanted, and the license was refused, so they had come down in the world in consequence, and had taken this

small inn, where they could just make ends meet. Mrs. Frankland missed the old customers who used to call, and felt this visit from Mr. Dempster something like a revival of old days, and asked him as to the changes he saw in Adelaide; and as Mr. and Mrs. Peck were Melbourne people, who did not know anything about the old colonists, Mr. Dempster spoke to her with freedom.

"You have been visiting your married daughter, I suppose," said Mrs. Frankland.

"Yes, that is the first thing I had to do on my return."

"A fine family she is getting about her, I hear; but I have not seen her for awhile. This house is not good enough for her to stay a night in."

"Yes, she has a very fine family—another little fellow since I left Adelaide."

"You must feel it lonesome now," said the hostess.

"Yes: it is the way of the world, and one should not murmur at it; but yet a man must

feel it very much when his only daughter, and one so much his companion as my girl was, chooses a home for herself, and surrounds herself with new ties and new cares."

"You should see and get some one to take care of you," said Mrs. Frankland, cheerily;—"a pleasant, kindly body—not too young. You must have met many such in England, who would have been glad of the chance."

"Yes, and who would have grumbled at the colony whenever she came out, and given me no peace till I took her home again. Now my business and my interests are all in South Australia. Besides, I like the young women best, and they would never look at an old fogie like me; so I must content myself with my memories of the past and my hopes for a future life. My home is not so lonely as you fancy it, Mrs. Frankland. Even here I feel the departed ones are near me. The veil that separates this world from the next is a very thin one; and if our intercourse with each other is less complete than in the days when we were together in the

flesh, it is none the less real. I have become a spiritualist since I went to England."

"A what?" asked the hostess.

"You must have heard of table-turning, and all those strange manifestations?"

"La! Mr. Dempster, I never thought of *you* giving in to a pack of nonsense like that. I beg your pardon for my rudeness, but really you *do* surprise me."

"What would you think of spirits who can read unseen letters—tell the names of persons whom none of the company knew—find out the secrets of every one in the room? You recollect Tom Bean, who was lost in the bush twelve years ago, and more; his spirit appeared to me in London, and gave me a message to his old mother, to say he was expecting her soon; and the old lady did not live three months after."

"Well, that is strange, but I would be very hard to convince. But yet, Mr. Dempster, that is no reason why you should not get a nice tidy body to make you comfortable. The spirits would not surely begrudge you that. And so

you had a pleasant voyage, and went round by Melbourne so as to see all that was to be seen. Did any of the old colonists come out with you?"

"We had a large party altogether—Mr. —— and his family, who had just been home to finish their education."

"And you admired the young ladies, of course, but really they are too young for you. Have they grown up handsome?"

"Not particularly handsome, but very pleasant-looking; but if you talk of beauty, it was a Melbourne lady who bore off the palm on board ship. Unfortunately, she was married, and it would have been very improper to take a fancy to her, but Mrs. Phillips is superb."

"Mrs. Phillips of Wiriwilta?" said Mrs. Peck, eagerly.

"Yes, I fancy that is the name of the place; at least the children used to talk about it by that name. Mr. Phillips is a sheep-farmer on the Victoria side," said Mr. Dempster.

"And you say she is handsome?" said Mrs. Peck.

"Perfectly beautiful!—but uneducated, and somewhat capricious. I fancy her face must have captivated her husband, who is a very intelligent, agreeable man."

"I suppose they are rich now?" said Mrs. Peck.

"Oh! very well to do, I fancy. I visited them a good deal when I was in London."

"How many children have they?" asked Mrs. Peck. "I knew them long ago."

"They lost one with scarlet fever before they sailed. There were four on board ship; but there are five by this time, for Mrs. Phillips stayed in Melbourne for her confinement, and had a little boy within a week of landing."

"Is her husband with her?" asked Mrs. Peck, eagerly.

"Oh, no! I think Phillips went up to his stations; he had a number of things to see to. What do you know about them?" asked Mr. Dempster, rather surprised at Mrs. Peck's curiosity.

"I was once in their employment at Wiri-

wilta, and Mrs. Phillips was uncommonly good-looking then. There was not so much style in those days as I suppose there is now."

"Probably not; we have all had to work hard for what we have earned in these colonies, and Phillips must have made his way like the rest of us. They had a very pretty little establishment in London."

"Kep' their carriage, no doubt," said Mrs. Peck, with a thinly-disguised sneer.

"No, they did not; but, if it's any satisfaction to you to know it, Mrs. Phillips has had a tour on the Continent, and has had a lady's-maid."

"A lady's-maid," said Mrs. Peck; "well! well! and the children, I suppose, are being educated up to the nines?"

"They took both the governess and the lady's-maid with them to Melbourne," said Mr. Dempster. "They were sisters, and very superior young ladies. In fact, to my taste, Mrs. Frankland, the lady's-maid was more charming than the mistress; not so regularly handsome—but very lovely—while as to intelligence and re-

finement there was no comparison. If she had been a dozen of years older I might have been a little presumptuous."

"Was this Mrs. Phillips so very far behind as that her maid was so superior to her?" asked Mrs. Frankland.

"It happened that these sisters were the young ladies of whom, even in these distant parts, you may have heard something; who were brought up to inherit a large property in the south of Scotland, by a very eccentric uncle, who left everything he had to a son whom nobody had ever heard of before, and left the girls absolutely penniless."

"Was not their name Melville?" asked Mrs. Peck, eagerly and fiercely.

"Yes," replied Mr. Dempster, astonished to find his chatty communications to his old friend, Mrs. Frankland, taken up in this way by this unprepossessing-looking stranger. "Yes, their name was Melville, and I never in my life met with more amiable, more intelligent, or better-principled girls."

"I saw about it in the papers," said Mrs. Peck, endeavouring to subdue her delight and exultation at the idea of the girls she wished so much to come in contact with being so near her as Melbourne. "I took a great interest in it. I like these romances of real life. And so, Mrs. Phillips is up, and these girls are down, and glad to eat the bitter bread of service. It is very amusing. Was Mrs. Phillips much taken up with them on account of their misfortunes?"

"I do not know," said Mr. Dempster, drily. "If you have served Mrs. Phillips you will know that she is not the same at all times."

"Then there was a large party of them on board; a servant, no doubt, and these two Melville girls, and the children?" said Mrs. Peck.

"There was also a sister of Mr. Phillips's—rather a fine woman, too—come out on a visit."

"And a fine lady, too, I dare say," said Mrs. Peck. "Mr. Phillips holds his head pretty high. I warrant his sister and Mrs. Phillips would have some sparring. And the children are good-looking, I suppose? I saw none of

them since the first was a baby. What are they like?"

"They are very pretty children, and getting on well with their studies. The eldest Miss Melville is the most thoroughly cultivated woman I ever saw."

"Oh, leave Cross Hall alone for that," said Mrs. Peck. "He was always crazy about education, and that sort of thing."

"Cross Hall!" said Mr. Dempster. "I suppose you will say next that you know Francis Hogarth, of Cross Hall, member of Parliament for the Swinton burghs?"

"Member of Parliament, too!" said Mrs. Peck, with the same subdued fierceness as when she first took Mr. Dempster up about the Melvilles. "Member of Parliament! Ungrateful dog!" she said, under her breath; but her expression of vindictiveness was not altogether lost on Mr. Dempster. "Oh, yes! I know him; or at least I know all about him. Nobody did know anything of him till he came into the property, you know; but I really know more about

him than most folks. There are some people that would give their ears to know what I do; but there is a saying in the north, where I was born, 'Least said is soonest mended;' at any rate, least said to them as it don't concern."

"If I had you at a *séance*," said Mr. Dempster, "I could get all your secrets out of you, whether you liked it or not. Yes, Mrs. Frankland, I really could."

"I don't think it can be right," said the timid hostess, who, though she was very fond of hearing the news, preferred to get them from living persons and not disembodied spirits. "Mrs. Peck, you are taking nothing."

"I got bad news just before tea, and that took away my appetite; but I have got over that now, so I'll trouble you for a mutton chop, Mr. Dempster, and Peck, just pass me the pickles, and be good enough to give me a hot cup of tea, Mrs. Frankland, for this one is as cold as a stone;" so Mrs. Peck felt inclined to make up for lost time, and made a very hearty supper. She wound up with two glasses of

brandy-and-water hot, and she got Peck out of the way, for she wished to have a quiet talk with Mr. Dempster.

Mr. Dempster was not disposed to encourage her confidence; her strange inquiries about people he had been greatly interested in, recalled the *séance* which had so much startled Francis Hogarth, and he suspected that this must be the person who had written the letter the spirit had been questioned about, and, consequently, that she was Hogarth's mother; no mother, certainly, to be proud of! The spirit said that her son ought to have nothing whatever to do with her, and Mr. Dempster was disposed to obey all spiritual communications. Besides this, all his instincts were strong against any intercourse with a woman so disreputable-looking, with an expression of countenance alternately fierce and fawning.

Now the fawning manner was put on. Mrs. Peck had an object in view—she wanted money to take her to Melbourne, and to take her immediately, and this easy-going, benevolent-look-

ing Adelaide gentleman seemed to be the most likely victim she could meet with.

She had long wished to see her daughter apart from her husband, and there never had been such a chance since she was married; and to get hold of one or both of the Melville girls at the same time was a conjunction of circumstances absolutely and marvellously favourable. Her last remittance from Mr. Phillips had been received a month before, and was spent as soon as it was got. Peck, with whose fortunes she had for many years connected herself, had not been lucky of late. He had come to Adelaide at race time, and had not got on well with his bets. He had done a little in gambling, but had got into a sort of row at a low public-house, and been taken up and fined for being drunk and disorderly, and dismissed with a caution; so he had gone up to the sheep-shearing, and then had worked a little at the hay-harvest, and again at the wheat-harvest. He could work pretty hard at such times, and make good wages; but he had no turn for steady, regular work, and neither

had she. If she had been in Melbourne, she could have borrowed the ten or twelve pounds needed for her passage-money, and a decent-looking outfit from people who knew her there, and guessed that she had some hidden means, either from friends or foes; but in Adelaide she was unknown except from her connection with Peck, which did not inspire confidence.

This Adelaide gentleman had just come from London, and could know nothing about her, so she was determined to use her plausible tongue, and get the money out of him.

As Mr. Phillips said, she was possessed with the spirit of falsehood. She always had a disinclination to speak the truth, unless when it was very decidedly for her own interest to do so, or when she was enraged out of all prudence. So now, when she wanted to get an advance from Mr. Dempster, she forgot the agitation and the eagerness which she had shown about the Phillipses, the Melvilles, and the Hogarths, and opened up a quite new mine of anxieties and fears. Her secret, such as it was, should not be

told to any one but the parties to whom it was valuable, and who would pay her handsomely for it, so she must now prevent this friend of the family from even guessing at what her schemes were.

CHAPTER III.

RAISING THE WIND.

As Mrs. Peck sipped her brandy-and-water, putting a constraint on herself in so doing—for her natural taste would have led her to swallow it in large gulps, but that would not have answered her purpose of impressing Mr. Dempster—she began to talk of the letter she had received from Melbourne, which had distressed her so much. Her daughter was ill and dying, and her son-in-law had written to her to beg that if she possibly could she would come across to see poor dear Mary before she was no more; but, poor fellow, he was always hard up—a decent well-meaning fellow he was—but he wanted push, and things had never gone rightly with him.

"They have never had the doctor out of the house since they have been married, and many births and many deaths keep a man always poor, Mr. Dempster, as well you must know; and it's many's the five-pound note as I've given to them out of my small means to help them through at a hard pinch, and he thinks, of course, as how I can just put my hand in my pocket and pay my passage in the first steamer as quick as he thinks for to ask me; and so I would, and would never have begrudged it, for my poor Mary's sake, but things has gone so contrary with me and Peck for this year back that I ain't got a penny to lay out. And there's the poor soul laying so bad, and thinking as I'm on the road, I dare say, and me can no more get to her without wings nor she can get to me."

"What is your son-in-law by trade?" asked Mr. Dempster.

"Why, he ain't got no trade to speak of, but he's warehouseman to Campbell and Co., in Melbourne, the merchants, you know," said Mrs. Peck.

"Then he must have a good situation and

regular payment—he ought not to be so badly off," said Mr. Dempster.

"There's such expenses with a family in Melbourne, where there's much sickness especially. A very decent, good-tempered fellow he is, and don't spend his wages away from his home. Poor Mary! I well remember the day she was married, and how pretty she looked in her white gown, and how she says to me, 'Oh, mother! I can't abear to leave you, even for James,' and now she is agoing to leave all of us. And when little Betsy was born, and I was a nursing of her, she looked up and says she, 'Oh, mother! I don't think as I'm long for this world;' but I roused her, and said she wasn't a-dying then, and my words was true, for she was not going then; but now to think my being so far from her and her so bad."

Then Mrs. Peck wiped her eyes energetically and sobbed a little. Mr. Dempster seemed to be soft-hearted and simple-minded. She thought she had made an impression, and she endeavoured to deepen it.

"I am a very old colonist. I have been in Australia this thirty year and more, travelling about from place to place. When you and Mrs. Frankland were talking about changes and ups and downs, I thought on a many as I have seen in the other colonies. There's them as I remember without a sixpence as is now rolling in gold. I don't know the Adelaide gentry so well, but I reckon they chop and change just like the others. It is very unlucky for me to be here just at this present time, for I know of a many in Sydney that I might have applied to for a little loan, and they'd have been glad to give me assistance; but, unfortunately, I am on the Adelaide side, where nobody knows me. There's the Hunters, of Sydney, that I was nurse in the family."

"And the Phillipses, of Wiriwilta, too, who I dare say, would be most happy to help you if you were straitened on the Melbourne side," said Mr. Dempster, drily. "Mr. Phillips is a more liberal man than Mr. Hunter."

"It is not Mr. Hunter I'd look to, but his wife; she has the generous spirit," said Mrs. Peck.

"The Hunters are at present in London—at least, Mr. Hunter and the family are. Mrs. Hunter died four years ago," said Mr. Dempster.

"That's a pity. Oh, dear, dear! I am sorry to hear that news. Poor, dear lady; but in the midst of life we are in death," said Mrs. Peck.

"No doubt we are," said Mr. Dempster. "No one knows that better than I do, for I am always living amongst the dead, and they occasionally help me to judge of people. I get a good deal of insight into character through their means; and my impression is, that there is not a word of truth in all you have just been telling me. You want to go to Melbourne, no doubt, but it is not to see a dying daughter. You have other plans in view which cannot be carried out here."

Mrs. Peck was somewhat taken aback by this blunt expression of opinion coming from a man apparently so suave and gentle. "Indeed, sir," said she, "I never heard nobody doubt my word

afore; but this comes of leaving the place where you are known. It is to see my daughter that I am most wishful to go to Melbourne. No doubt I might have other reasons, for I don't like Adelaide; but it's this letter and this bad news that has made me so set on going. But I was asking no favour of you. If I did want a loan of a trifle, I'd have paid back every farthing of it with good interest. But I think I had better draw on a friend of mine in Melbourne. I suppose that if I did that, I could get the draft cashed at any of the banks?"

"You could get it cashed anywhere, provided you showed your authority to draw, and convinced the person to whom you applied that your friend was good for the money. Under these conditions I should not mind advancing it for you myself."

"But you'd be rather hard to convince, I fancy," said Mrs. Peck. "After the unhandsome way you have doubted my true story, I would not like to apply to you. But any advance that any one would make to me would be

as safe as the bank. I have an annuity, and have had it for many years."

"No," said Mr. Dempster, "you have no annuity; you got a sum of money instead."

Mrs. Beck started at this confident assertion, and coloured indignantly. "How can you speak so positive about things you can know nothing about? I have an annuity from another quarter."

"For valuable services, I suppose," said Mr. Dempster. "Well, if you can prove that you are still in receipt of an annuity, and if you can lodge an order to forestall it, I dare say you can get an advance from any Adelaide bill discounter; but I myself would rather not do business with a person who I feel is not to be relied on."

To put an end to the revelations, true or false, of this unpleasant old woman, Mr. Dempster asked to be shown to bed, as he was tired; and he found his room, though small, was as clean and comfortable as Mrs. Frankland had been used to give to him in her more prosperous days.

Mrs. Peck's first attempt had failed, though it had appeared very promising. She thought she would next try Frankland, who, though he was poor, might be victimized to the extent of ten pounds. She did not think she could affect him by dwelling much on the desire she felt to see her dying daughter, though for the sake of consistency it was mentioned as her motive to get to Melbourne just at this time; but she had several sums of money due to her in Melbourne, and she was afraid, from the letter she had just received, that she would lose them if she kept out of the way; there was nothing like being on the spot—nothing like prompt measures when one wants to get in money. Mr. Talbot's letter was sufficient warrant for her to raise money on Mr. Phillips's annuity, but not for the purpose of going to Melbourne, which she had unluckily betrayed. It was also rather disagreeable in its tone, and not likely to inspire confidence in any one who read it. So she had only her own representations to trust to, and she certainly gave a very minute, and at the same time glowing

account of her debtors and her expectations from them; but what with one thing and another she had really never been so hard up in her life. Peck had not got all his wages for harvesting, and she had been so foolish as to lend a little money in Adelaide, which she feared she could not get back. Indeed, they had a score at the inn that had lain too long; but if she could only get her own she could pay all and be quite easy. She spoke of a rate of interest for a trifling advance that rather dazzled Frankland, and he was wondering if he could not manage to raise it, when his wife came into the room, and stopped their talk by saying it was bed-time. When she was told of Mrs. Peck's wishes and her offers, Mrs. Frankland peremptorily refused to listen to them, saying they had no money to advance to any one. Frankland had brought them down low enough in the world by being so free in lending and in spending. If she had not taken care of the business, and worked early and late, and looked after the money so far as she had it in her power, they would not have had a roof over

their heads by this time. What with the licence that had just been paid, and the rent that must be paid before the end of the month, they would be cleared out, without advancing money to strangers that were in their debt already. As Mrs. Frankland was really the bread-winner, and at their present low water the purse-keeper also, Mrs. Peck saw it was of no use to press her offers on her husband in the face of such formidable opposition.

On the following day she started early in the mail conveyance for Adelaide, leaving Peck behind as a pledge for the settlement of the bill, and determined to raise ten or twelve pounds somehow.

With Mr. Talbot's letter in her hand she presented herself to a bill-discounter in Adelaide. He understood her position at once; that she was somehow connected with, but very obnoxious to a wealthy client of Mr. Talbot's, for Mr. Phillips's name was not mentioned in the letter; and also that, like most people of her class and habits, she had spent her money before she got

it. Of course she said nothing of wanting to go to Melbourne, in which case, by the body of the letter, it would be almost certain that her annuity would cease, but the discounter wanted some security against such a contingency, and asked her if she meant to stay in South Australia, according to agreement. Mrs. Peck was willing to say anything, to swear anything, and to sign anything, for his satisfaction on this point, but her very fluency made him suspicious.

"I cannot advance this money," said he, "even on the deposit of your order to arrest what is coming to you, unless I have some collateral security, or some other name, in case of your going to Victoria."

Mrs. Peck could get no one to corroborate her statements but Peck, who could be of no service to her. She felt rather in a fix.

"What should take me to Melbourne?" said she, in accents of great surprise. "It is so much against my interest to go there, that I would never be such a fool as to quarrel with my bread and butter; but it so happens I am much in need

of money just at the present. I am expecting money from Scotland every mail. Indeed, it was trusting to that as put me so back this quarter. I never doubted that I'd get a hand some sum from Scotland; I've got the rights to it, and if it don't come by next mail, I will prosecute. You are sure to get your money well paid, with good interest, if you do run just a little risk."

"That may be all very well," said the bill discounter; "but, in the meantime, can you not get any one to back you in this? I like good interest, but I cannot lend without better security."

"There's the best of security. Mr. Talbot's next payment is due in two months, and I make it over to you; and if that does not satisfy you, I would give you something more next pay day, as much as would cover your risk and your trouble, and your interest, handsome enough."

"Not at all handsome, if I chance to lose it all. One needs to keep one's weather eye open, in dealing with old hands like you, Mrs. Peck."

"Then you won't do this for me—such a trifling accomodation as it is?"

"Not without some one to back you," said the money-lender.

"I daresay I can easily find that, if you are so stiff," said Mrs. Peck, as she flounced off in great indignation, and with very little hope of succeeding in what was required.

Here was she in possession of a secret worth so much to her, and unable to turn it to account for want of a beggarly ten or twelve pounds. The bill discounter was too sharp for her; she must try a good-natured man next, one who would be willing to do her a kindness—but here again, Mr. Talbot's letter, her only authority to give any security, would injure her more than with the keen man of the world. There was a steamer to sail on the morrow for Melbourne, and no other for a week or ten days; every day was of the greatest consequence, for now that she had made up her mind not to make terms with Francis, but to do so with his cousins, she was eager to carry her resolution into practice, and

she must get on board the Havilah, if possible.

She had lived some weeks in Adelaide in rather a poor way, and in rather a poor neighbourhood, when she and Peck had come first across. She had made acquaintance with very few people, and had left Adelaide slightly in debt, but in her eagerness she was inclined to overlook those circumstances, and to hope that some one or other of her late neighbours might be prevailed on to be a guarantee to the money-lender merely as a matter of form, and he might be induced to accept of it; so she turned her steps in the direction of her old residence.

She looked into the shop where she had been accustomed to make her purchases of groceries, with an intention of paying the eleven shillings which she owed if things looked promising, and if it would be a good speculation.

"Well Mrs. Smith, and how are you?" said she to the woman who kept the establishment with the favourite old Adelaide sign of "General Store."

"Much as usual, Mrs. Peck. You went away rather in a hurry," said Mrs. Smith.

"Oh! Peck had to go off to the sheep-shearing, and I had the offer of a good nursing in the country, so I had to move at a minute's warning, you see. But how are you getting on here?"

"Much as usual, Mrs. Peck; but the news is, that my man came home last night, after being at them diggings for four years, and not writing me a word, good or bad, for three and more; and now he expects me to be as sweet as sugar to him after serving me so; and me had all his children to keep and do for, and got no help from him no more nor if he was dead; and now he says as how I give him the cold shoulder."

"Well, to be sure, and no wonder either! Whon a woman's been served so, she has the right to look a bit stiff," said Mrs. Peck, who had heard during her stay in Adelaide that Mrs. Smith had passed judgment by default, and was going to take to herself another mate, which was nothing more than the absent Smith deserved.

"Well, to be sure, that beats cock-fighting; and what does Harris say to all this?"

"Why, in course, he's off, and I'm in such a quandary," said Mrs. Smith.

"You wasn't married to Harris, out and out, was you?" said Mrs. Peck, who had a keen relish for such interesting news as this.

"No; there was two or three things as put it off; but the banns was gave in last Sunday, and I had got my gown for the wedding, and lovely it looks—and here's Smith as savage as if he had been writing to me every month and sending me money."

"I suppose he's come home as poor as a rat, like the rest of them?" said Mrs. Peck.

"No, no, I cannot just say that," said Mrs. Smith, relenting a little, "He says he never had no luck till the last six months, and now he has come back with three hundred pounds; and he's been behaving very genteel with it, I must say, and brought presents for me and for the children—there's a shawl for me as is quite a picter—so rich in the colours; but I can't say I

feel quite pleased at the way he neglected me so long. And poor Harris, too; I can't just get him out of my head all at once."

"That's natural enough," said Mrs. Peck, with a sympathizing sigh.

Here Mr. Smith came into the shop, and started at the sight of Mrs. Peck.

"Well! who'd have thought of seeing you here, Mrs. ——? I don't rightly recollect your name, but I know you as well as possible," said he.

"Mrs. Peck is my name," said she impressively. "I recollect you well on Bendigo."

"Many's the time I've seen you there," said Smith, in an embarrassed tone of voice. "I hope as how you have your health, Mrs. Peck. Susan, my dear, you'd better give Mrs. Peck some refreshments. Step in, Mrs. Peck, I'm just a day home, and I ain't come back too soon, neither, as it appears. Susan, my dear, get out the spirit bottle. Will you have brandy with hot water or cold, Mrs. Peck?"

"With cold this hot day. I've been half

baked travelling in that mail omnibus twenty miles, and the wind blowing through it like a flaming furnace; and now your Adelaide dust is making me as grimy as I'm not fit to be seen," said Mrs. Peck, wiping her face with her handkerchief, and watching how Smith mixed her brandy and water. "There's nothing pleases me like meeting with an old friend."

"Nor me," said Smith, "if so be as she is friendly. Now, Susan, sit down and have a glass with us. Why, the woman looks handsomer nor the day I married her. I don't wonder at the risk I ran of being choused out of you; but it was rather too bad, too, was it not, Mrs. Peck? If my letters hadn't a miscarried you would never have thought of such a thing, Susan," said he, with an insinuating smile, handing his wife a mixture similar to that he presented to his old friend.

"If they had been written there would have been no fear of their miscarrying," said she rather sulkily.

"Here's Mrs. Peck—my good friend, Mrs.

Peck—who will be a warrant how often I used to be a speaking of you, and a wondering what made me give up writing."

"That I will," said Mrs. Peck, who felt this little bit of romance was quite in her line. "Many's the time I've heard him speaking about you and the children."

"Take another drop of brandy, Mrs. Peck," said her newly-found friend.

"Thank you," said she; "it's better brandy than we used to get at Bendigo, but really I am in too much trouble just now to enjoy it, and I won't take no more nor the single glass. It's a bad world and a sad one, and I seem to have more than my share of trouble."

"Dear me! Mrs. Peck, I am sorry to hear that; and I am sure I wish I could do anything to help you," said Smith.

"I don't like imposing on people that I haven't no claims on, but I am in great need of twelve pounds just for a little while. I have an annuity, as I dare say you heard at Bendigo."

"Yes, I heerd on it," said Smith, who ap-

peared indisposed to contradict or doubt anything that Mrs. Peck said.

"But we have been tried with sickness and doctors' bills—Peck and me—and I am very backward with the world just at present. If anybody could lend me twelve pounds for two months, they'd get principal and interest handsome. You being an old friend turned up, and me knowing you so well at Bendigo, makes me bold enough to ask you for this little temporary assistance. I would deposit an order for the money with you if you will be so good as to advance it."

"Certainly, Mrs. Peck, I am not the one to be backward when a friend is in need, and I know it will be safe enough to be paid. Susan, it is perfectly safe. Mrs. Peck had money regular every quarter, to my knowledge; and if she wants the money now, it shall be paid down on the nail." And Smith told out the twelve pounds into Mrs. Peck's hands, and received an order for repayment on Mr. Talbot, which was not to be presented for two months.

Mrs. Peck was overjoyed at her unexpected

good luck in meeting with this returned digger, whom she had known very well at Bendigo under another name, and where he passed himself off as the husband of another woman. She perceived that now he had found his wife in Adelaide, doing very well in business, he would rather that she heard nothing of his own little infidelities, particularly in the first days of meeting, and his probable loss of the money he advanced was not too high a price to pay to purchase silence.

Everything had turned out most propitiously for Mrs. Peck, so far. The information from Mr. Dempster showed that all her objects of interest were collected in one spot, and this recognition of Smith put into her hands the means to get to them while Mr. Phillips was absent. She was flushed with hope and confident expectation when she made her purchases of some articles of ready-made clothing, and took out her passage to Melbourne in the 'Havilah,' to prosecute her plans for revenge on Francis and advantages to herself.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS PHILLIPS MEETS WITH A CONGENIAL SPIRIT IN VICTORIA.

As Mr. Dempster had reported there had been a division in the family of the Phillipses shortly after they landed. Mrs. Phillips wished to remain in Melbourne for a month or two, as she did not feel able to stand the long land journey at this particular time. Neither her husband nor herself had much confidence in Dr. Grant's skill, and she could have better attendance in town. Mr. Phillips having ascertained that Mrs. Peck was in Adelaide, and having, through Mr. Talbot, sent a request that she should remain there, which her own interest was likely to make her attend to, had less objection to her staying in

Melbourne than he ever had before; so he took a suite of furnished apartments for her and those of the family who remained in town.

Jane Melville went at once to Wiriwilta with the children, who all longed to be there, and who disliked Melbourne more than London. Miss Phillips had her choice to remain in town or to go up to the station, and she decided on the former alternative, for she began to fear the station would be very dull, and would contrast unfavourably with the voyage, which had been lively and pleasant. There were some of her fellow-passengers whom she was unwilling to lose sight of; and Mr. Brandon was not at Barragong, but in Adelaide, so, on the whole, she thought it would be preferable to stay. She gave as her ostensible reason for the choice, her wish to be with Mrs. Phillips during her brother's necessary absence. Mr. Phillips stayed with his wife till she presented him with a second son, and then, as she was doing very well, he left her in the care of his sister and Elsie.

He had been rather annoyed to find that

Brandon had been amusing himself by taking a journey to Adelaide so soon after coming out to the colony again. Dr. Grant came down to meet Phillips, and represented that a great deal had gone amiss at Wiriwilta since he (Dr. Grant) had been supplanted in the charge of the stations; so that he thought it indispensable to go up with the least possible delay to look to all the flocks and the out-stations.

"It was the wildest thing in Brandon to start off in that way," said Grant, "with a poor lad of a nephew who did not know a wattle from a gum-tree when he came, and scarcely a sheep from a cow. *I* never would have done such a thing."

"But he has gone to buy some new sheep, I hear," said Phillips. "Have they been delivered at Wiriwilta?"

"No, not yet," said Grant; "and I think that was the most insane part of the business. I am sure our Victorian flock-masters have always kept ahead of the Adelaide lot; and to go to the Adelaide side for sheep would be the last speculation I should care to enter into for

myself, not to speak of implicating you in such a thing. The long overland journey will pull them down so much that you are likely to lose a third of them on the road, and what you do save will be in wretched order. Brandon was fairly ruined by going home to England."

"Ruined!" said Harriett Phillips. "He said he was ruined, or something like it, before he left. Are his affairs really in such a bad state?"

"Oh, it's not exactly his affairs, but he got unsettled and would not work as he used to do. He overturned most of my arrangements at Wiriwilta; and I am sure Mr. Phillips will not find himself any the better for his alterations. He is so foolishly confiding. Now, I like to look sharply after my people, and then I see what work I get out of them."

"I think you are quite right, Dr. Grant. I have remarked the want of that prudence in both Mr. Brandon and my brother. They think it proceeds from benevolence, but I attribute it more to indolence and the dislike to give them-

selves any trouble they can avoid," said Harriett.

Dr. Grant was piqued at being deprived of Mr. Phillips's agency, for though he had protested against taking it, he had found it very lucrative; he was also piqued at Mrs. Phillips staying in town for her confinement, though he always declared that he detested practising, and only did it as an accommodation to his neighbours; but both things had added alike to his emolument and his importance, and he was extremely jealous of any slight being cast either on his business knowledge or his professional skill. On this occasion he offered to stay in Melbourne for a week or so after Phillips left, merely as a friend, to see how Mrs. Phillips was going on, and to take up a full and satisfactory account to the station. Though he was not her medical attendant, he was as much in the house, and far more than he had ever been before. When the week was over, he appeared to be in no hurry to go away, but wrote to Phillips instead; and hung about the house, went errands for her or

her sister-in-law, took Harriett out for walks and drives, brought all his Melbourne acquaintances to call on her, and to inquire for Mrs. Phillips and the baby, and was himself engaged for several hours of every day in conversation with Harriett.

He had come to Melbourne determined to fall in love with Miss Phillips, whose likeness he had seen and admired at Wiriwilta years ago, and whose face and figure, when seen in reality quite came up to his expectations, while her air and manners were exactly suited to his taste. He knew that she had a fortune—not large, certainly, but tempting to a man who was not exactly poor, but always more or less embarrassed. Her perfect self-possession, her good education, her musical talents, her excellent connections, her stylish way of dressing, her very egotism, were all charming to a man who wanted a wife who would do him credit.

His Scotch family was a good one; he was connected with many noble houses; he could tell long traditional stories of the feats of the

Grants and the Gillespies, his father's and mother's ancestors; and it was wonderful how much the history of Scotland, and indeed that of the world generally, seemed to hang on the exploits of those ancient clans. Though Harriett was not a Scotchwoman (it was the only drawback to their perfect suitability), she appreciated these anecdotes wonderfully well. Dr. Grant laid himself out to please her in a much more marked manner than Brandon had ever done, and his success was much greater. He had a subdued feeling that his neighbour at Barragong was his rival, as he had seen so much of Harriett in England, so he lost no opportunity of mentioning anything that would tell against him.

Then he was of the same profession as her father and brother Vivian, and liked to hear her talk of them. Indeed, provided he got time and opportunity to speak about his own relations, connections, and friends—to give anecdotes of his schoolboy and college days, more interesting to his mother than to any one else heretofore—to describe how he had felt the colonial hardships

at first, and how he had gradually made himself very comfortable at Ben More (which was the name he had given to his station, so much more suitable for a Scottish squatter than such native names as Brandon and Phillips had retained for theirs);—he would allow Harriett to give her school and society reminiscences too, to describe her home in Derbyshire—the furniture, the ornaments, the lawn, and the greenhouse—the county Stanleys, and the county balls. As they were generally *tête-à-tête* four or five hours a day, they had ample time for descanting on all these interesting topics. Any visitors who might drop in, or any visit that they might pay together only gave fresh food for further comparison of their own personal tastes and predilections. Miss Phillips's avowed contemptuous compassion for everything colonial did not at all offend Dr. Grant. He had never been thoroughly acclimatized himself, and he had vowed never to marry any of the second-rate colonial girls, who, as he thought, had no manner and no style. It was surprising how well these two

new friends agreed about everything and everybody.

Dr. Grant, from his education and his habits, considered himself a reading man, and a very well informed one. Miss Phillips, too, had thought Brandon greatly her inferior in literary acquirements, as in all other things; but it was singular to observe how little these two people, who were so congenial to each other, and who enjoyed each other's company so much, and had so much of it, talked about the many books they must have read. As for religion, politics, or any other of the great concerns of life, they never seemed to rise even on the surface of conversation; and when a book happened to be mentioned, it was dismissed with a casual remark, such "I read it," or "I did not read it," or "I liked it," or "I thought it stupid," and then they turned to things which more nearly interested them, and these were things in which they themselves or some one related to them made some figure. If any of Miss Phillips's, or any of Dr. Grant's relations had published a

book, that would have been mentioned and extolled, but they had not. Vivian's scientific attainments, which Harriett had thought rather a bore at home, were however something to boast of here; and Dr. Grant had an uncle who had made some improvements in agriculture in the north of Scotland, of whom he was never tired of talking.

Miss Phillips had remained in Melbourne to be with her sister-in-law, but she was very little beside her. Besides Dr. Grant, there were fellow-passengers who visited at the house, and whose visits Miss Phillips was bound to return, and there were also public places to go to with them; for she wished to see all that was to be seen in Melbourne while she was there; and though she generally criticised all the Melbourne concerts, and theatres, and balls, and private parties very severely, she accepted every invitation and joined every party that was made up for the theatre.

Elsie and the nurse had the care of Mrs. Phillips and the baby, though Elsie would have

preferred being at Wiriwilta, with Jane and the elder children, for she missed their cheerful society, but she could not be spared. Miss Phillips was in exceedingly good-humour at this time, and did not exact so much from Elsie as she had expected; but Mrs. Phillips missed her husband, and was rather petulant and capricious. She had been considerably kinder to Elsie since the death of her little girl. This first sorrow had done her good; but now, in her husband's absence, a good deal of the old spirit returned, particularly as she was much offended at the little attention which Harriett paid to her. Elsie was the real housekeeper, though Miss Phillips had the credit of it, and she was delighted to find how well she could manage. Her old experiences at Cross Hall had not been altogether thrown away; she had grown more thoughtful, and she felt she must depend on herself, for there was no Jane now to fall back upon.

Elsie was apprehensive that the coolness between the sisters-in-law would lead to an open

rupture, for Mrs. Phillips had not been accustomed to be considered as nobody in her own house; but there appeared hope for peace in the fact that Dr. Grant must leave Melbourne; and then those long conversations must have an end, and at least three-fourths of the rides and gaieties which served as an excuse for her neglect. During the short absences from day to day which necessarily took place, and during the few angel's visits, "short, and far between," which were paid to her sister-in-law's sick room, Dr. Grant's sayings and doings, his compliments to herself, and his criticisms of other people, were the staple of Harriett's conversation to the invalid. If the absence of the one and the visits to the other were prolonged, it was just possible that Mrs. Phillips might be more fatigued; but she could not be so much ignored as she was at present.

CHAPTER V.

DR. GRANT PROSECUTES HIS SUIT WITH CAUTION AND SUCCESS, AND BRANDON FINDS HIS LOVE-MAKING ALL TO DO OVER AGAIN.

HARRIETT PHILLIPS could not come out quite so strong in her contempt for colonial ways and colonial people, arriving when she did, as if she had landed ten or a dozen years before, but still there was a great deal that was open to criticism. Mr. Phillips and Mr. Brandon thought the colony had made rapid strides towards civilization and comfort since the great influx of wealth consequent on the gold discoveries had attracted to Victoria much that was unattainable before. Even during their absence in England there had been a great deal of building going on in Mel-

bourne, and many other improvements had been introduced. The houses were better, and better furnished; the shops seemed to contain everything that enterprise could import or money procure; the ladies were handsomely and expensively dressed, and there were public amusements such as were never heard of in the early colonial days.

But still there was much even in Melbourne that was un-English and strange to a new comer.

Melbourne did not at all come up to Harriett's expectations, though what she had expected it would have been difficult to tell. She had wished to go to Victoria because it would be a novelty to her—it would be so different from England that it would be amusing—but every difference that she observed, and she was very quick in observing such things, was always for the worse. There was, of course, the difference of climate, which led to many alterations in dress and manner of living, and which would reasonably lead to more if the English colonist was not so much wedded to old customs and costumes. The heat

and dust Harriett found to be insupportable, and the dress which was most suited to it was so unbecoming, particularly the gentlemen's dress, with the endless variety of hats for head-covering. Dr. Grant, who stood a good deal on the dignity of his profession, when in Melbourne wore dark clothes and a black hat even in the heat of summer, and that weighed in his favour with Harriett. The noise and bustle of Melbourne was so different from what she had been accustomed to in Derbyshire—indeed it was more like Liverpool than any part of London she had seen—a poor edition of Liverpool; and that was the city of which the Victorians were so proud. She could not enter into the natural liking of a people for a town that they have seen with their own eyes grow from a mere hamlet of rude huts to a handsome, paved, lighted, commercial city like Melbourne—who identify themselves with its progress, having watched the growth of every improvement. They wonder that it does not strike strangers as being as astonishing as it appears to be to themselves.

Mrs. Phillips had no acquaintances in Melbourne; but Mr. Phillips and Doctor Grant knew a good many people, who were disposed to be very friendly to Harriett, but she did not feel very grateful for such kindness. She fancied that her position and education, and her being recently out from England ought to give her an overpowering prestige in these half-savage lands, and though she lost no chance of laughing or censuring anything which she thought colonial, she could not bear being talked of as a new chum, whose opinions should be kept for two years at least before they were worth anything, and whose advice was probably worth nothing at any time.

Amongst other subjects for censure, the great freedom of manners, particularly amongst young people of different sexes towards each other, struck Miss Phillips forcibly. She had observed at evening parties, at picnics, and at places of public amusement, the very unrestrained way in which they talked and behaved, and she thought the colonial girls were badly trained, and that they ought to be more carefully watched by

mothers and chaperones. At the same time she took full latitude herself, and did many things on the strength of her being in Australia, where people might do as they liked, that surprised even the colonial girls themselves.

If she remarked on their flirtations with their old friends, they could not help observing Miss Phillips's prepossession towards her new acquaintance, and laughing at the manner in which the two seemed wrapped up in each other. How could she endure his returning to Ben More, and leaving her, perhaps, for another month in Melbourne without his society, was a question which they frequently put to each other; but she solved that difficulty to her own satisfaction and as much to their amusement.

"I am very sorry to leave you," said Dr. Grant one day to the object of his attentions, "but I must go. Business must not be neglected. I cannot be flying about like Brandon, letting my affairs go to ruin. I hope you will not be long in coming to Wiriwilta, Miss Phillips."

"Not very long, I suppose," said Harriett.

"Indeed, I think there is nothing to prevent Mrs. Phillips from going home now, if she would only believe so."

"Nothing whatever," said Grant.

"I am quite wearying to see Wiriwilta," said Harriett: "the children's letters are quite rapturous about its beauties, and Miss Mellville, too, seems very much pleased. You will like Miss Melville, I am sure. You like Scotch people, I know."

"If I do not like Miss Melville better than her sister, my liking will not go very far," said Grant.

"Do you know Stanley thought Alice quite pretty at first—I don't see it. Miss Melville is what people call plain, but I prefer her appearance to Alice's, and she is very clever and strong-minded. I quite expect you to fall in love with Miss Melville," said Harriett, with a little laugh.

"No fear of that. I have no fancy for strong-minded women. Not but what I like a good understanding and good sense in a lady, but let each sex keep to its own department. But,

Miss Phillips, if you really want to go to Wiri-wilta, I can drive you up—or, better still, you could ride. You are an admirable horsewoman, as I know, and I have an excellent horse in town that would carry you easily that distance without fatiguing you. It would be a beautiful ride. You would see the country so well as you go along."

"I should like to go, of all things," said Harriett; "but what would Stanley say?"

"Oh, I will tell him it was quite unnecessary for you to stay with Mrs. Phillips, and it will be the easier for his horses to bring up the rest of them, if you have gone before," said Grant.

"Well, I am really tired of Melbourne; I think I have seen all that is to be seen, and I dare say there are some preparations and arrangements I could make before Mrs. Phillips comes up, so as to make her more comfortable, though I dare say Miss Melville has done her best. Still, there are things that one of the family can do which strangers cannot be expected to attend to."

"Certainly," said Dr. Grant; "I can imagine your presence at Wiriwilta will make things more comfortable for all parties."

"And, by-the-by, Emily and Harriett will be neglecting their music, and I engaged to see to that so long as I remained in Victoria, as Miss Melville knows no music."

"No music!" said Dr. Grant; "that is a singular sort of governess to engage for young ladies up the country."

"She is wonderfully clever about other things, and brings on the children very nicely. When I compare them with the girls of their own age whom I have seen in Melbourne, I cannot help congratulating my brother on having brought out a governess with him. It would have been better, of course, if she had been English, but Miss Melville is not painfully Scotch."

"I hope you have no dislike to Scotch people," said Grant. "I myself glory in my country."

"Oh, I quite understand your feelings. If I had been born in Scotland, I should have felt the same, I dare say," said Harriett.

"But, with regard to this drive or ride to Wiriwilta?" said Grant.

"How long should we be on the road?" asked Harriett.

"Two days, I think. We would stay all night at Mrs. Ballantyne's, a very old friend of mine, and an acquaintance of your brother. Ballantyne and I were fellow-passengers when we first came out. They will receive you with bush hospitality. I should like to introduce you to Scotch bush hospitality, and it is a pretty place, too; rather romantically situated."

"I should really like to see it, for I want to study Australian scenery and Australian manners during my short stay in the colony, to see as much as I can while I am among you savages."

"Then, shall it be a ride or a drive?" asked Dr. Grant.

"I think I should prefer driving," said Harriett; "but I must first consult Mrs. Phillips. I do not suppose that she can enlighten me much, but as Stanley's wife I owe her that courtesy."

So Harriett, with a condescending smile, took leave of her admirer.

Mrs. Phillips was in an exceedingly bad humour, but she made no objection to Harriett's going away. She did not quite believe in the zeal for the children's music or for her comfort, which Miss Phillips professed, but she was tired of having the name of her society without the reality of it. As for the impropriety of her sister-in-law's travelling all that distance with a single gentleman, either riding or driving, Mrs. Phillips had never decided any question of the kind for herself or others since she had been married. She had always acted as her husband thought proper, that is to say, she might often have made mistakes or done wrong if he had not prevented her, and the proposition did not strike her as at all objectionable. Elsie wondered if there was an engagement between her and Dr. Grant, when a young lady of such strict principles proposed so singular an expedition. Harriett was not at all quick at reading countenances, and was particularly dull in the interpretation of

Elsie's; but as some idea of the kind had dimly occurred to herself, she gave it voice and explained her views on the subject, in Elsie's hearing, to Mrs. Phillips.

"Of course I should never think of such an adventurous journey in England, but here it seems the fashion to do just as is most convenient to ourselves; and for your sake and that of the children, I think it is better that I should go first. Dr. Grant being a professional man, and such an old friend of my brother's, will be an excellent escort, and I am really desirous of seeing a little of the roughness of colonial life. We will stay all night at Mr. Ballantyne's, and reach Wiriwilta in good time the second day. I will see to have everything comfortable for you, Lily, my dear, before you come up. I wish you could accompany me. Dr. Grant says you could go up now, if you were disposed."

"I am not going to Wiriwilta till Stanley comes himself to fetch me, for I am so timid with any one else driving on these dreadful roads; and as for what Dr. Grant says about my being

fit for the journey, he is not my medical man this time, so I won't go by his advice. Besides, he don't understand my constitution as Dr. M—— does," said Mrs. Phillips.

"I feel very sorry to leave you, Lilly," said Harriett.

"Oh, I dare say I'll get on very well, even without you. Alice and nurse will do for me until Stanley comes. Tell him how I weary to see him the very first thing you say when you see him. Whenever he's done with going over the stations, beg him to come down. Alice has written for me to tell him to make haste. I am not strong enough yet to sit up to write."

The idea that Harriett might hasten her husband's return to her, helped to reconcile Mrs. Phillips to the very cavalier treatment she received from that young lady.

Harriett enjoyed her drive exceedingly. Dr. Grant knew who lived in a great many houses that they passed, and they carried with them the great subject of agreeable conversation in themselves. The Derbyshire country and the High-

land scenery was compared and contrasted with the Victorian, very much to the disadvantage of the latter, which, indeed, did not look its best, but its very worst at this time. Mr. Ballantyne's station Harriett confessed to be rather prettily situated: but things in the house were much rougher than she had expected, and the house itself was of a very irregular and primitive style of architecture—the slab hut enlarged so as to be tolerably commodious; yet, still, the very house that the squatter had built, partly with his own hands, in the early days of the colony. He had not been a fortunate man, but he had got his head above water since the gold discoveries; and he was not so imprudent as to involve himself again by building a handsome house so long as the old one would do. Mrs. Ballantyne had an overweening opinion of the advantages of English society and English education, and received Miss Phillips with an amount of adulation quite beyond anything she had ever met with in her life; which was all the more effective from its being perfectly sincere. Her own children

were but half educated, and very deficient in acquired manner; and they too looked with awe on Mr. Phillips's English sister, who was so self-possessed and so fashionably dressed. To a person less conscious of her own superiority, Mrs. Ballantyne's profuse apologies for everything and everybody would have been rather painful; but Harriett received them graciously, and told Dr. Grant that she felt quite delighted with this first specimen of bush hospitality, and with his Scotch friends.

Dr. Grant on his side was exceedingly proud of his companion, and felt quite sure of his success with her; he never had been so agreeable as during this long drive, and when they appeared at Wiriwilta, on the second day, in time for an early tea, both travellers were full of spirits, and not at all tired. Mr. Phillips was not at home, and not expected for some days. Jane was somewhat surprised by the appearance of Miss Phillips under such care, but received her politely and kindly.

Dr. Grant had to go home to attend to busi-

ness, but promised to ride across to Wiriwilta, as soon as possible, to see if Miss Phillips had not suffered any fatigue from the long journey over such rough roads.

It was rather flat at the station for Harriett on the following day. She was disappointed with the house, for though it was a great deal better than Mrs. Ballantyne's, it was not so large or so convenient as she had expected. She could not take any interest in the many things which the children showed her, which they thought so beautiful—their pet animals, the few wild flowers they could find at this season of the year, their dear old trees, their pretty walks, the native boy Jim, Mrs. Bennett's baby, and the curious windmill that Mr. Tuck had made for them with his clasp knife and some twigs. She could not be troubled with such childish talk; she wanted rational conversation; but when Jane Melville sat beside her, and conversed in her own quiet sensible way, she felt even that to be unsatisfactory.

A new element had entered into Miss Phillips's

life. She was, after her fashion, in love; and she was restless and dissatisfied without the presence of the beloved object. Dr. Grant was just long enough away to be very welcome when he came; and Jane was a little amused at the manner in which Harriett threw off her languid air of indifference, and talked to this (to Jane) most uninteresting Scotchman, who was so full of national pride and personal vanity. Jane was very cosmopolitan in her ideas, both by nature and by education. Her uncle had always had more pride in being a Briton than a North Briton, and never had fired up with indignation at Scotland being included or merged in England. She did not think Scotchmen intrinsically more capable than English; there was a greater diffusion of elementary knowledge in the northern part of the island, but she thought that in society Englishmen were more agreeable than Scotch, as a general rule, because they were more certain of their own position. Scotch and Irish people are apt to be afraid that they are looked down upon, and are too often on the look-out for slights

to be resented, whereas Englishmen, who do not know much of continental feelings and habits of thought, have a comfortable conviction that the greatest country in the world belongs to them, and that nobody can dispute it. Dr. Grant was surprised at Jane's want of nationality, and confided to Harriett that he was greatly disappointed in her; and in spite of Harriett's professed regard for Jane, she could not help seeing the faults which this keen-sighted observer pointed out.

One day when Dr. Grant and Harriett were in the enjoyment of each other's company, and flirting in their own interesting manner, and Jane was sitting beside them with the children, Mr. Brandon and Edgar made their appearance. Emily and little Harriett met Brandon with acclamations, and the little ones rejoiced over him in a very noisy manner, too. Jane gave him a hearty welcome, for she was really delighted to see his face again, but Miss Phillips and Dr. Grant were scarcely so affectionate.

"Well, here comes the recreant knight," said

Miss Phillips. "What have you got to say for yourself, Mr. Brandon?"

"To say for myself! Oh! I have a great deal to say for myself. I have seen a great deal since we parted in London."

"But why have you left your own business and my brother's, and gone wool-gathering in South Australia?"

"I have just gone wool-gathering, and that must be my excuse. Phillips will admire the sheep, I am sure. They have just got home in first-rate condition; easy travelling and plenty of time. But where is Mr. Phillips and Mrs. Phillips?"

"Oh, mamma is in Melbourne, and we have got a new little brother, and his name is to be Vivian, after uncle Vivian, you know; and papa is out over the runs, and will be back on Saturday; and I am sure he will be very glad to see you, and Edgar too, I dare say," said Emily.

"And where is your sister, Miss Melville? Has she come out to Australia with you? Is she quite well?" asked Brandon.

"Quite well," said Harriett; "she is in Melbourne with Mrs. Phillips. We expect them out in a week or two, or perhaps as much as three weeks, for Mrs. Phillips fancies she cannot stand the journey for some time."

"Alice has not seen Wiriwilta yet," said Emily. "I know she will think it very pretty; Miss Melville likes it very much."

"And you have got quite strong, Emily?" said Brandon.

"Quite strong again. I can walk to the water-holes near the grove of young gum-trees and back again without being a bit tired. We have such lovely walks every day with Miss Melville. And do you know Mr. Brandon, my dear old Cockey died just after you and Edgar went away to Adelaide; but I have got another —such a beauty—and two such lovely parrots. Jim got them for me. You can't think how glad Harriett and I were to see Jim. And Mrs. Bennett has got another baby, and I'm to be godmother, and it's to be called Emily; and Mrs. Tuck has got another too, ever so fat.

We have not seen our own baby brother yet."

"But how does it happen that you did not write to me? I got one letter telling me little Eva was dead, and that you were getting better; but next month I did not hear a syllable, good or bad, from any of you."

"Because we were on board ship by that time, before the mail from Australia came in. Papa thought we would be all here sooner than we were—but it was a delightful voyage. We had Mr. Dempster—you know Mr. Dempster—and such a lot of nice Adelaide children. I was so sorry to bid good-bye to Rose; she was my friend all the voyage; and there were some very nice gentlemen, too. It was quite as nice a voyage as the last, only that Miss Melville made us do lessons all the time; and perhaps after all it was as well that she did."

"I never heard such a chatterbox as you are, Emily," said her aunt.

"Did you find the voyage pleasant, Miss Phillips?" asked Brandon.

"Oh, yes, very pleasant indeed."

"I did not think you would condescend to visit our rude latitudes," said Brandon.

"Oh, I am really quite enjoying my visit. Stanley was greatly pleased at my proposal to come out, for he thought it such an excellent thing for the family. I am only on a visit, you know. I cannot say how I should like Victoria for a permanence, but I like the novelty for the present."

"And your cousin is in Parliament, I hear, and likely to distinguish himself, Miss Melville," said Brandon. "I hope that you and your sister do not despise us poor colonial people."

"Certainly not," said Jane; "indeed, Francis says that he got most of his best ideas from Mr. Sinclair, who had been in Canada and the United States, and from a conversation between you and Mr. Phillips and Mr. Dempster the first day he dined with us in London. He says nothing sharpens an Englishman up like intercourse with such pushing, energetic, straightforward people as colonists."

"That is high praise from a British member of Parliament. I owe him something for that. But did you see Peggy before you left?"

"Yes; we went up to bid her good-bye. I think she will not be long in joining us," said Jane.

"Well," said Grant, who, as well as Harriett, felt that Miss Melville was receiving more than her fair share of Brandon's conversation, "you have not given at all a satisfactory account of yourself. You have been figuring away in Adelaide, I suppose, and enjoying yourself, and leaving your own affairs and Mr. Phillips's affairs to mind themselves."

"And you have been figuring away in Melbourne, Dr. Grant," said Emily—she could not bear any aspersion to be cast on her friend, Brandon—"and then you brought Aunt Harriett away; so you leave no one with poor mamma but Alice. I am wearying so to see mamma and the baby boy."

"Suppose you go with me," said Brandon; "for I am going to Melbourne to-morrow to

see them, and I have some business there besides."

"Oh! that would be delightful. Miss Melville, may I go?"

"I think not, Emily," said Jane. "Your mamma will be soon here, and your papa will be disappointed to find you gone when he comes here. I should not wonder that he will take you with him when he goes himself, and that would be better, I think."

"Much better," said Miss Phillips. "I wonder that you could think of such a thing as troubling Mr. Brandon to take care of you all that long way."

Emily made rather a pertinent remark as to her aunt showing her the example, at which Miss Phillips blushed, and Grant looked conscious but delighted. He could not conceive what was taking Brandon to Melbourne immediately on his return from Adelaide; he did not believe his assertion that he had business to attend to there. It was another sign of his being spoiled by his visit to England—it had completely unsettled him.

Now that Brandon had heard that his letter had never reached Elsie, and consequently that he had not been treated by her with discourtesy or unkindness, he felt relieved; but, at the same time, a little sorry that all his trouble had been wasted, and that it was all to do over again. A few months ago he had lamented that he could not have it out by word of mouth; but now he regretted that his letter had not, at least, broken the ice, and inclined her to listen to his suit. However, things had come to such a pass that he could not wait an indefinite time; he must go to Melbourne and learn his fate without delay. He left Edgar at Wiriwilta, where Emily thought him very much improved, and where the boy was exceedingly happy. He took a great fancy to Miss Melville, who was very different from the fond anxious women who had brought him up, but whose experiences with the Lowries had given her great interest in boys of that age, and who knew so much on all subjects that she never failed to win upon them, if they were tolerably intelligent and well disposed.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. PECK'S PROGRESS.

ALL things continued favourable to Mrs. Peck's plans—she met with no disaster by sea in her voyage from Adelaide to Melbourne; the "Havilah" brought her to her destination in three days, and she landed on the familiar shores with a light and hopeful heart. She was not long in discovering where Mrs. Phillips lived, which was in East Melbourne; and as no time was to be lost, she repaired to the house on the very day on which she landed, dressed decently and respectably, like the wife of an artisan, or perhaps with more of the appearance of a monthly nurse.

The girl who opened the door asked her name

when she requested to see Mrs. Phillips, and she announced herself, not as Mrs. Peck, but as Mrs. Mahōney, under which name she had taken out her passage, and begged to see the missis by herself for a few minutes. Mrs. Phillips was then sitting in an easy-chair in the drawing-room, the nurse was engaged with the baby, and Elsie busy in Mrs. Phillips's room; so the stranger was introduced to have a quiet interview with her daughter.

"Well, Betsy, do you not recollect me?" said Mrs. Peck, in a subdued but intensely earnest voice, whenever the girl was out of hearing. "Have you forgotten your own mother?"

Mrs. Phillips grew deadly pale, and was about to scream.

"Hush! Betsy, be quiet," said her mother. "I've only come to pay you a friendly visit. I've longed so to see you again all these years, and now I heard you was by yourself, I thought I must run all risks to get a look at you. Why, how handsome you've grown, and everything handsome about you, too;" and Mrs. Peck

gazed with wondering admiration at the beautiful, well-dressed, queen-like woman whom she had parted with when a mere girl, and had never seen since her marriage. "Rings on your fingers, and a gold chain round your neck, and everything you can wish for. Oh, Betsy, I made your fortune, and you never take a thought for me. I might be dead and buried, and you'd never care a straw. I have had a hard life, a very hard life—tossed about from place to place, and often in want of many things that at my time of life I need to get—and you in such luxury. My pretty girl, my beautiful daughter!"

Whatever might have been the resemblance between mother and daughter, there were but slight traces of it now. Mrs. Peck might have been beautiful at sixteen, but her life had not been so conservative of her charms as Mrs. Phillips's was; besides, Mrs. Phillips resembled her father much more than her mother, and he had been of a much more lymphatic temperament, and was at the same time a remarkably

handsome man. Mrs. Peck was not yet sixty, but she looked old for her years, and more like the grandmother than the mother of Mrs. Phillips, whose easy circumstances, indulgent husband, and indolent, self-regarding life, with no emotion and little excitement, had kept her face free from a single line of care or anxiety. Her mother's face was ploughed up with innumerable lines, and her features seemed to work with every varying passion, while her expression was hungry, eager, and wolf-like, without showing anything more intellectual than cunning, even in its calmest moments.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Phillips, "if Stanley was to find you here, he would never forgive me."

"Is it your fault that I could not rest till I saw you again? I never thought he'd be so cruel and unreasonable as to blame you for what I'd do."

"But I heard you was in Adelaide, and Mr. Phillips says that, as long as you stay in Adelaide, he will see that you know no want.

Oh, mother, you had better go back to Adelaide!" said Mrs. Phillips.

"Is that my girl as is talking?" said Mrs. Peck, disdainfully,—"my girl as I loved so dear, and was so proud of—that now, when I've come all the way from Adelaide, and risked all I've got to depend upon, just to please my old eyes with the sight of her handsome face, and my poor old ears with the sound of her voice, would banish me the minute I come! That's a pretty husband you've got—that you're so afeard of him. You deserve that your children should turn against you when they grow up. Oh, Betsy, how can you talk so cruel?" and the old woman caught her daughter's hand, and kissed it with much apparent, and no doubt some real feeling. "You're not expecting of him home for a while; let me come and let me go while he is away—my name is Mrs. Mahoney. Say as how I am an old servant of your mother's, or an old servant you had at Wiriwilta, or the mother of some one you know—call me what you like, but let me just have the liberty to come

and see you and the baby, and then I will go back to Adelaide, and Mr. Phillips need never know nothing about it?"

Invention was not one of Mrs. Phillips's talents, but her mother revelled in it, as I have said before. She delighted to go amongst people who did not know her, where she could give out an entirely fictitious history of herself quite new. Even to her intimate acquaintances her narrations were singularly inconsistent. When her interest demanded that she should speak the truth she did so, but it was with an effort; when the balance lay the other way she had no hesitation and no scruple.

"I ain't good at these stories, mother," said Mrs. Phillips, "and I don't just see what good it will do me to get into trouble with Stanley on your account. It is just the one thing he is unreasonable about. When he married me he said he made only one stipulation, and that was, that I should have nothing to do with you or with Peck, and I said I wouldn't."

Mrs. Peck here began to sob, and Elsie

who was sewing in the next room, hearing a little noise, and afraid that Mrs. Phillips was not well, came in at this moment. Mrs. Phillips was quite at a loss to account for the emotion of her visitor, but her mother was equal to the emergency.

"I am sure, Mrs. Phillips, I cannot say what I feel," said she, "but your goodness really overpowers me. To think as the little girl as I knowed when she played with my poor Susan as is now no more should recollect me now she's growed up so beautiful, and has such a fine house of her own, and should help me in my troubles! It is quite too much for me. But all I want is just a little to start me in a way of business, and I'll be sure to pay it back again if I get on—and I have got a good connection, a capital connection—your liberality I can never forget;" and Mrs. Peck fumbled with her purse, and looked very hard at Elsie. This was the person whom she wished to see, even more than her ungrateful daughter, from whom she had expected a kinder reception. Elsie looked simple-

minded enough—there was no doubt she would be easily dealt with, and much better by speech than by letter.

"This is your maid, I suppose?"

Mrs. Phillips assented.

Mrs. Peck turned to Elsie and said, "I think as how the missis wants some sal volatile; she looks a bit faint—she don't seem to be strong yet."

Elsie fetched the sal volatile, and gave Mrs. Phillips a little of it, and then returned to her work. She was puzzled at the stranger's speaking of Mrs. Phillips's liberality—for she was not generally liberal—and at her fumbling at her purse as if she had received money, for she knew that Mrs. Phillips had left her purse in her bedroom.

"You *must* let me come and go for the few days I am to stay in Melbourne, Betsy," said her mother.

"Oh, I'd rather give you money, if you need it—at least, all I've got."

"I fear I will need money to take me back,

for I made such an effort to get across, but I could not help it. But I won't hurt you, Betsy, and I may do you good. What sort of girl is it that you've got?"

"Oh, a very clever milliner, and a handy girl enough. Stanley says he thinks her pretty, but I don't see it. He makes a great fuss over both her and her sister, but Jane is plain."

"If he says he thinks her pretty, I'd not keep her in the house if I was you. I know what men are," said Mrs. Peck.

"I don't think you know what Stanley is," said Mrs. Phillips, with some dignity. "I did not like it at first, but I ain't frightened now; and besides, they are both so badly off it's quite a charity to keep them."

"If she is a milliner, I know of a capital situation," said Mrs. Peck.

"Stanley would be in a pretty state if I let her go to a situation of your recommending," said Mrs. Phillips.

"Oh, I don't mean to meddle with your affairs; but young people are very unwary.

You think as how you're too handsome for your husband to think of looking at another woman; but I know the world better nor that. Howsomever, that is neither here nor there. But you know I am risking my annuity from Mr. Phillips by coming here to see you; but I heard in Adelaide that for the first time since you was married I might have the chance of seeing you, without making dispeace, which is the last thing I would wish to do. So, Betsy, if you will be reasonable, and let me come again, as Mrs. Mahoney (an old neighbour in New South Wales), and help me, as you say, with money to take me away, I will be as quiet as a mouse. It is a pleasure to see you, and to speak to you. Give me a little needlework, and let me sit with your maid, and just have a look at you now and then, and at the baby. I ain't seen none of your children, Betsy. Because you've been so well off, and had no cares, you shouldn't turn off your mother in that unfeeling way."

"Oh, I wish I dare do it. But if Stanley

was to come—he may come suddenly. I've sent him a message to hurry home. You can't think what a good, kind husband he is to me, mother. But he'd be furious if he found you here."

"Oh, if he comes home you do not need me to work any longer; and you can give the girl that message; and you can drop me a hint if I happen to be in the house. Even if he was to see me here, I know I could find some reason. I am never without an excuse."

Mrs. Phillips was not particularly fond of her mother, who had been very harsh and violent-tempered to her in her childish days, while she was as fond of her husband as she could be of any one but herself, and she knew with what abhorrence he regarded this fierce, cunning old woman. She wished Mrs. Peck to be satisfied with this one visit and to come back no more, for she feared that Alice and the other servants might suspect something, and she had no confidence in her own powers of concealment. But Mrs. Peck had more ammunition in her chest; she again began to sob, and showed symptoms of

going into violent hysterics, and bewailed her own hard lot and the cruelty of her ungrateful daughter so loudly, that she was glad to agree to her demands to make her keep quiet for the present.

Mrs. Peck then saw the baby, which she admired exceedingly, and accepted of some refreshments. Mrs. Phillips got her purse, and really gave her some money; and shortly after, her mother took leave, engaging to come back on the following morning to do some needlework, and uttering many blessings on Mrs. Phillips for her kindness and generosity in Alice's hearing. Mrs. Phillips looked greatly relieved when she was out of the house, but the apprehension of her return weighed considerably on her mind.

CHAPTER VII.

BUSINESS INTERRUPTED BY LOVE.

Mrs. Peck appeared on the following day, according to promise, carrying a little black bag, containing scissors, yard-measure, and a few other implements of needlework, all perfectly new; and after a short conversation with Mrs. Phillips and a little refreshment, she sat down beside Elsie to ingratiate herself with that young lady. Elsie thought she had never seen any one so ignorant of the work she had set about as Mrs. Mahoney appeared to be. She confessed that she was not skilful, and it showed all the more kindness in Mrs. Phillips to give her work when she had had so little practice, and did it so badly. She had been accustomed to go out as a nurse,

she said; but she had got too old for that, and could not stand the sitting up of nights; and then she branched off into accounts of dreadful experiences in nursing, and deathbeds, and awful operations, that were enough to make Elsie's hair stand on end. She found fault with Mrs. Phillips's nurse as being too much of the fine lady, and told Elsie what she considered to be a nurse's duties, which she would like to do if she was only fit for it. Then she threw herself on Elsie's good nature for a little lesson in needle-work, admired her quickness and taste and skill, wished she could do anything half as well, and asked her to be good enough to cut out and place her work for her, and to lend her patterns, and altogether behaved with the most insinuating affability.

Although Elsie Melville looked simple-minded, she was by no means wanting in observation, and her situation with Mrs. Phillips and her sister-in-law had taught her a wonderful amount of prudence. She thought there was some inconsistency in Mrs. Mahoney's fluent narratives, and

something very peculiar in her relations with Mrs. Phillips, who appeared to be restless and uncomfortable whenever she was in the house. Elsie was, however, good-natured enough to give her some instruction, for which great gratitude was expressed. On the third day of her visits, when apparently occupied in learning how to do featherstitch for trimming baby's pinafores, Mrs. Peck looked up from her work, and asked Elsie if she did not come from ——shire.

"That was my native county," said Elsie.

"Do you know Cross Hall at all?" asked Mrs. Peck.

"I was brought up there," said Elsie.

"I come from that county, too," said Mrs. Peck.

"I did not think you had been Scotch," said Elsie.

"I have been in these colonies for thirty-four years, and seen but few of my own country folks; but the English say they'd know me to be Scotch by my accent."

"Well, 'perhaps your accent is a little like

that of ——shire, when I come to think of it; but the turn of your expressions is not Scotch at all," said Elsie. "Thirty-four years is a long time, however; I may, perhaps, get rid of some of my own Scotticisms by that time."

"I knew Hogarth of Cross Hall, very well, when I was young," said Mrs. Peck. "Do you mean to say you was brought up there?"

"Mr. Hogarth was my uncle," said Elsie.

"Oh, you must be a daughter of his sister Mary's; I fancy there was only the one daughter that lived to grow up. But if Cross Hall was your uncle, how came you to be in this situation?" said Mrs. Peck, with feigned astonishment.

"My sister and I were educated by him; he was exceedingly kind to us as long as he lived."

"But his property did not come to you;—the heir-at-law swallowed up all," said Mrs. Peck, with a fierce glare in her eyes that she could not quite subdue. "It is very hard on you."

"We have felt it rather hard," said Elsie; "but still things have been worse for us at one

time than they are now. Jane and I can earn our own living, and that is the position of most people in the world."

"What would you give now," said Mrs. Peck, "if you could get back to Cross Hall, and be just as you used to be?"

"I cannot say what I would give," said Elsie. "But it is impossible. Unless we could restore my poor uncle to life, things could never be again as they used to be."

"And the new man might have helped you, and not have driven you to seek service at the ends of the earth. Would not you like to serve him out?" said Mrs. Peck with the same subdued fierceness as before.

Elsie's instinctive sincerity would have led her to justify Francis, by explaining about the will, but she felt reluctant to say anything to this strange woman that she could help. Besides, though she knew nothing of the letter that had been sent by Mrs. Peck to her cousin, and left unanswered, at Mr. Phillips's earnest request, she was beginning to suspect something of the truth.

Mrs. Peck's courting her so assiduously had puzzled her; and now the interest she felt in this story, which was all the more apparent to a keen observer from the efforts she made to conceal it, showed that she knew more about the matter than she liked at once to disclose.

Elsie had a good eye for likenesses, and could see family resemblances where no one else could; and it had always struck her as very remarkable that there was not the slightest resemblance between Francis and her uncle, nor between him and any other member of the family whom she had seen or whose portraits had been preserved. Not merely were the features and complexion unlike, but there was not a trick of the countenance or of the gait reproduced, as is generally the case with the sons of fathers who had such marked characteristics as Henry Hogarth. Though she had not heard of Mrs. Peck's letter, Jane had told her about Madame de Véricourt's to her uncle, and in her own heart she had fancied that the reason why he had been so cold to Francis was, that he had been doubtful of the

paternity; the very indifferent character of the woman he had married was not calculated to inspire him with confidence, and the absolute absence of all family likeness was an additional cause of distrust. He must have been satisfied on that point, however, in later years, or he would not have been so strong in his prohibition of his marriage with Jane or Elsie on account of his cousinship; but, in early life, he must, in Elsie's opinion, have had grave doubts on the subject.

She looked again more careful than before at Mrs. Peck. She was of the age to be Francis's mother, but otherwise she was quite at fault; there was not any likeness there either. A conformation of the little finger was rather peculiar, but it was an exaggeration of a little defect on Mrs. Phillips's otherwise very handsome hand, but not of Francis Hogarth's.

"If Francis has no right to the property, and we have, of course we should like to have our rights," said Elsie.

"It was a Scotch marriage, you know," said Mrs. Peck.

"Yes, but a binding one; he is received everywhere as my uncle's lawful son."

"Yes, as his lawful son, no doubt. Do you know if he has brought forward his mother at all?" said Mrs. Peck.

"No; I suppose she is dead, or we should certainly have heard of her."

"Dead, you suppose!" said Mrs. Peck, indignantly; "that is the easy way of getting quit of relations that has got claims on you--just suppose them dead!"

"I do not know anything of the matter, except that she has not been heard of. If she were alive and heard of his inheriting this property, she would be sure to write claiming him, and probably asking for assistance, which I have no doubt she would at once receive, for he has ample means, and has the character of being both just and liberal."

"And you think she would apply; and you have no doubt that she ought to have got it? Any one would have thought that," said Mrs. Peck, between her set teeth.

"Yes, certainly," said Elsie; "but perhaps she did not go the right way to work?"

"She did," said Mrs. Peck, indignantly. "I knowed her well, and heard all about it."

This was to throw Elsie off her guard, for she did not wish to be identified at once; but it had not the effect desired, for Elsie felt convinced that this was the person who claimed to be Francis's mother.

Mrs. Phillips came in at this interesting poise in the conversation, and began to give Elsie directions as to some alterations in a dress.

"There's some buttons and trimmings to get to make it up with. Alice, you had better go to town and get them for me. You need a walk, at any rate; I do not think you've had your walk at all regularly of late," said Mrs. Phillips.

"Indeed," said Mrs. Peck, "she has had no walk since here I've been, whatever she might have had before. It's trying work sitting still all day; I feel it myself, and all the more that I'm not used to it. If you'd be so good as excuse me for a hour or two; I'd take it as a great

kindness if you'd let me go with Alice for a walk to do her bit of shopping, and to show her round Melbourne a bit. If I don't know Melbourne well, I ought to. I don't think I ever saw so good a hand as Alice has. I think I could make her fortune, if she'd only give me a little commission."

"Oh, I don't think Alice is inclined to leave me," said Mrs. Phillips; "and, indeed, I am very well satisfied with her."

"But this ain't exactly her sphere. She was a telling me as she was brought up with great expectations," said Mrs. Peck.

"She has got over her disappointment about that, I think," said Mrs. Phillips.

"I dare say you think it shabby in me to try to entice your maid from you; and really, after all, a comfortable home with a lady, as it must be a pleasure to serve and to wait upon, is perhaps the best thing after all. But as I was saying, Mrs. Phillips, I would be glad to get out for an hour or two with Alice. I'll not do much work without her, for I'm sure to go wrong if she is not at

my elbow. There's not many ladies so generous as you, to pay me for my blundering work; and Alice is wonderful patient too. I don't know how to thank her for the pains she takes with me, and I can't help being very stupid. After being used to active life, one don't take well to this sitting still. So I'll just put on my bonnet and shawl and go out a bit with Alice."

Mrs. Phillips did not at all like this proposal, for she had an idea that her husband would very much disapprove of it, and would be still more angry at that than at her having her mother in her house; but then Mr. Phillips was away, and her mother was there, and the present terror conquered the distant one. She never knew what her mother might or might not say, if she thwarted her in anything: she had distant recollections of the terrible punishments that always followed the slightest act of disobedience, or even carelessness, in her childish days; and though now she knew her mother would not strike her with her hands, she was in constant dread of her tongue. So that now Mrs. Peck took it for

granted that she would be allowed to accompany her daughter's maid—she dared not refuse it. Alice scarcely liked the idea of going to walk to town with this strange woman; but at the same time her curiosity as to what she might have to say was very great. She felt that this Mrs. Mahoney had intelligence to give that was of great importance, and that she wished to be secure from interruption. Mrs. Phillips was constantly going in and out, for she was afraid to leave her mother long with any one, and always looked suspicious of what they might be talking about. Mary, the housemaid, and the nurse, too, seemed to be curious about this old needlewoman, and were often coming in unexpectedly.

When Mrs. Peck had put on her bonnet and shawl, and dropped her veil over her face, she looked sufficiently respectable for a companion to one so little known in Melbourne as Alice Melville, so she thought there could be no harm in going out for an hour or two with her for the sake of ascertaining if she had any light to throw on the dark subject of Francis's birth.

When they got out of doors, Mrs. Peck appeared at first to be rather anxious to resume the conversation which her daughter had interrupted; but as they were pretty closely followed by two other pedestrians all the way into town, she made up her mind to attend to Mrs. Phillips's business first, so they went to Collins-street and bought the trimmings. Then Mrs. Peck went to a bookseller's shop and purchased a shilling novel that she said she had been told was very interesting, but she appeared scarcely to know the name of it, and took the first one the shopman gave to her.

Elsie thought she was a good deal more stared at than was agreeable, and also that the shopmen in both establishments addressed her with a good deal of familiarity. She had heard Miss Phillips complain of the great freedom and the want of politeness of Melbourne tradespeople and the inhabitants generally; but this was her first personal experience of anything of the kind, and she rightly attributed it to the company she was in. She felt, now, that she had made a great mistake

in going out with this Mrs. Mahoney, whose rather loud remarks and vulgar appearance seemed to attract general attention, and she could only wish fervently that, with or without her secret, she could get back safely to East Melbourne. As they returned, Mrs. Peck proposed a détour by the Botanic Gardens, which Elsie had never seen. Mrs. Phillips would not expect them home soon, for she had proposed to show Miss Melville all about Melbourne; and the gardens were well worth seeing. On a week day they were quiet, and one could get a seat to have a little comfortable talk. Much as Elsie wished for the talk, she would not on any account lengthen her walk for it, so she declined the proposal.

"Then," said Mrs. Peck, "let us go out of the regular road we came by, and go round Fitzroy Square, and have a look round at all the churches and chapels that are built on the Eastern Hill."

Fitzroy Square was not at that time enclosed or planted. It was merely a vacant space, in-

tersected by numerous footpaths in various directions, and covered where there was no beaten path with very dusty withered-looking grass. Elsie had no objection to go out of the thoroughfare; but, instead of pointing out the churches or anything else, as soon as Mrs. Peck had got safe out of any third party's hearing, she slackened her pace, and eagerly opened the subject which was nearest to her heart.

"I said, Miss Melville, that I could make your fortune if you'd only give me a handsome commission. Are you willing to drive a bargain?" said Mrs. Peck.

"If I can see my way clear to the fortune, I should, of course, be glad to pay you for the information; but I must know what you have got to say before I can guess what it is worth," said Elsie.

"And I must know what you are willing to give, before I can tell what I know," said Mrs. Peck.

"But I have really got nothing to offer," said Elsie; "you know how poor I am."

"But suppose you and your sister was to get Cross Hall through means of me, what would you give me for that?" asked Mrs. Peck.

Elsie felt sure that this woman could not give the property to Jane and herself, for it had been left to Francis distinctly by will, by name and description; but yet she wanted very much to find out if he was really their cousin or not, so she said—

"I must consult with my sister on this matter, for it concerns her as much as myself, and also with Mr. Phillips, who has been to both of us the kindest and best of friends, before I could make you any definite offer."

"No, no," said Mrs. Peck; "I want no interference of strangers, and I ain't got no time to waste here while you write up the country to anybody. I must go back to Adelaide in a few days, and surely your sister will see the advantages of your acting for her. What do you say to 2,000*l.*?"

To be asked 2,000*l.* for what Elsie knew to be worth nothing, in a money point of view, ap-

peared to her rather absurd. "That is a very large sum," said she.

"A year's income is not too much for such a secret as I've got. Cross Hall must be worth 2,000*l.* a year now, and more than that, and I must have something handsome to cover my risk."

"Then you put yourself under the grasp of the law by what you have to reveal?" said Elsie.

"You must let me get clear off before you publish it," said Mrs. Peck. "I have been treated with the greatest ingratitude by Frank, and I'd like a little revenge. I'd like to pull him down from his high horse, and set him working for his bread as you have had to do; but at the same time I am a poor woman, and I must live."

"I cannot tell what we would give you," said Elsie, "until I have something more distinct than these vague threats; but you may be sure that we will give you as much as it is worth. Trust to our honour for that."

"Trust to a fiddlestick's end! I am too old

a bird to be caught with such chaff as that. No, I must have it down in black and white. See, here is a paper that I want you to fill up and sign before I'll open my mouth on the subject." So Mrs. Peck drew out of her black bag a paper containing an agreement to pay her 2,000*l.* on condition that the estate of Cross Hall should be recovered for her and her sister through Mrs. Peck's information. She laid the paper open on the book she had bought, then she took a pen and a portable ink-bottle from the same repository, dipped the pen in the ink, and demanded Elsie's signature then and there.

Her eager eyes watched the girl's countenance as she read the agreement and weighed the pros and cons of the bargain she was making, and neither of them were aware, in their preoccupation, that they were observed. When Elsie looked up, puzzled as to what she was to do, and Mrs. Peck was putting her pen into her hand, she saw the figure of Walter Brandon approaching her with the appearance of haste and agitation. Mrs. Peck snatched the paper from

Elsie's hand, and replaced it in the black bag, along with the other writing materials and the extempore desk.

"Alice Melville!" said Brandon, "what in Heaven's name are you doing here in such company as this?"

Elsie turned as pale as death; she could not utter a syllable.

"Come with me—let me take you home. I heard from Mrs. Phillips that you had gone out; but I could not have imagined you to have such a companion."

"Such a companion, indeed!" said Mrs. Peck, indignantly. "I have been in these colonies more nor thirty years, and I'm good enough company for any fine lady's-maid as ever walked on shoe leather."

"Oh, Mr. Brandon!" said Elsie, who had recovered her powers of speech; "she was doing needlework at Mrs. Phillips's, and I was sent out on an errand, and she would come with me."

"And we was just a looking over the bill,

and seeing as our money was all right," said Mrs. Peck, in the most plausible manner.

"No; it was not a bill," said Elsie, who hated the idea of this woman telling lies for her.

"Did Mrs. Phillips actually send you out walking with this person?" said Brandon, with a look of the most intense contempt and disgust at Mrs. Peck.

"She said nothing against it; but she did not send me; it was all my own fault," said Elsie, weeping bitterly. "I rather wished to go with her."

"My dear Miss Alice, you must have seen that this was no fit person for you to associate with. You are an innocent girl, ignorant of the world, as all girls ought to be; but you are not so easily deceived in character as not to see in this woman's face, language, and manners, that she is to be avoided as you would avoid death and destruction," said Brandon.

Elsie only wept more bitterly than before Brandon must despise her for ever now. She had been glad to come out to Victoria, because

she thought if he still loved or cared for her she should hear of it. She had treasured his parting words and his parting looks in her heart; and now to meet him again in this way—to feel that he must look down on her as in the old days of his pity he never could have done—was dreadful. How was he to guess at the almost irresistible temptation that had led her to compromise herself so far?

"You had better go home to your own dwelling, Mrs. Peck," said Brandon; "for if Mr. Phillips were to know that you had been visiting his wife in his absence you would come by the worst of it. Needlework, indeed! Mrs. Phillips is a fool, certainly; but the idea of your doing needlework for her is very absurd. So you had better never show face there again."

"Perhaps you'd like to know where I live, Miss Melville," said Mrs. Peck, glaring angrily at Brandon. "I lodge at No. —, Little Bourke Street, and can be heard of there, either as Mrs. Mahoney or Mrs. Peck. You can come there to see me."

"Like to know where *you* live—go to see *you!*" said Brandon, in towering indignation. "Now Miss Melville knows your real character she will keep away from you for ever. So now go off with you, as quickly as you can."

"Good-bye, Miss Melville," said Mrs. Peck, as she slowly went on her way to her own lodgings. She found she must go, but she would not be hurried by Brandon's wrath.

He waited till she was out of hearing before he tried to soothe the feelings of the agitated girl she had left under his care.

"Now where can I take you to? If Mrs. Phillips allowed you to do such a thing as walk through Melbourne with Mrs. Peck, she is not to be trusted with you. Oh, if Peggy were only here—but she is not: your sister told me she had not left Edinburgh."

"Take me back to Mrs. Phillips; she will be as glad to get rid of this woman as you can possibly be," said Elsie.

"But she must have known there was something wrong, for she looked confused and

ashamed when I asked for you, and when I settled down to wait till your return, she seemed quite restless till I went away. Indeed, she sent me on an errand in quite a different direction; but I wished to come this way, and thought there was no hurry about her commission. I always knew her to be a fool, but not so wicked and false as this proves her to be."

"I think this woman frightens her," said Elsie.

"She has some hold on her, no doubt. Poor Phillips! we had better say nothing to him about it. So you would really prefer going home to her," said Brandon.

"Yes, certainly," said Elsie; and she paused for a little. "But, Mr. Brandon, I am in want of advice and assistance more than I ever was in my life. I must have it, and have it immediately. Can I rely on you as a friend?"

"Yes, as a friend;—certainly, as a friend," said Brandon, who wondered what revelation was about to be made. Surely no love affair with some one else!

"I believe this woman is the person who calls herself my cousin Francis's mother," said Elsie. "I think she came to Mrs. Phillips's for the express purpose of ingratiating herself with me, in hopes of selling me a secret which she knows, and which she declares will give to Jane and myself the possession of Cross Hall."

"Ah!" said Brandon, slowly; "and is this her little game at present?"

"Now, I have often thought that Francis was not my uncle's son—there is not the slightest family likeness; and she is capable of any fraud or deception. I really knew she was not good when I went out with her, but we had no chance to speak without interruption in the house, and I did not think she was so well known in Melbourne as she appears to be. I know I have done very wrong, but I really had some excuse. If she can prove this ——" and Elsie paused, in hopes that Brandon would say something to show that he felt for the greatness of her temptation.

"But, my dear Miss Alice," said Brandon, "she cannot take the property from your cousin. Was it not left to him by will, and left to him because he had proved himself worthy of it?—at least, I believe that is what your sister and Peggy have told me. She tries this game of hers with a girl who knows nothing about business. It is of no use whatever."

"She has no idea about the will, and thinks that Francis got the estate as heir-at-law. But my view of the matter is this, that if Francis is proved not to be our cousin, he might marry Jane, and not lose the property. That is what I aim at, for they love each other, I am quite sure."

"If they do, I wonder he did not throw up the fortune, and set about earning one for himself. It was a good deal to give up, too—a seat in parliament, and such a career as appears before him. But what are wealth and fame compared to love?" said Brandon, who had got rather into heroics.

"I do not like to say much to Jane about it,

for it only distresses her; but I think—I am almost sure—that he offered to make the sacrifice, but that Jane would not accept of it. She rejoiced in his useful and honourable life. She would not consent to be his drag and stumbling-block. She must have felt it very hard, too; for I feel she loves him dearly. It was for their sakes that I was so anxious to discover this woman's secret. She wants to be revenged on Francis, who has not answered her letters, and has sent her no money. I am a little surprised at that; but yet I believe that he must have had good reasons for his conduct, for there never was any one more thoroughly conscientious and liberal than the cousin I want to lose—the brother I wish to gain. Would it not be a glorious revenge if this Mrs. Peck, in her spite, were to give him all he wants—the only thing missing in his cup of happiness?"

"Perhaps, then, it is a pity I interrupted you so soon," said Brandon, admiring the generous enthusiasm of the girl; "but you were too dear to me, too precious, to be left in such suspicious

company a moment longer than I could help. I came to Melbourne with one purpose—and that was, to entreat you to reconsider the answer you gave to me in the railway carriage."

"I did not know you so well then," said Elsie. "I thought you only pitied me; and now I fear I have given you cause to despise me."

"Nothing of the kind," said Brandon; "nothing of the kind. I love you far more now than I did then; and though I was so stupid and idiotic as to fancy that Miss Phillips would suit me as well, whenever I saw you together her faults came out, and your virtues. I do not wish to take you at a disadvantage. Do not think it ungenerous in me to ask so much just when you are in trouble and perplexity, and need advice and assistance."

"And just when I have appeared in such an unfavourable light," said Elsie, in her low, sweet voice, a little tremulous with the excitement of the scene.

"But I will give you the best help I can,

and the best advice my poor head can supply, whether you return my love or not. Do not let that weigh with you for a moment. Nothing I can do can make me deserve you. If I am not bodily on my knees before you—for in a public place like this it would be absurd, and you would not like it—I am mentally on my knees, willing to accept whatever you may choose to give me—love, if possible; but if your heart is otherwise engaged, or if you cannot love such a commonplace fellow as myself, then I will *try* to be contented with friendship. Which shall it be, my dearest Alice?"

"Will you have any objection to accepting of both?" said Alice, in the same tremulous tones.

"None," said Brandon, delighted, "none whatever; indeed, one implies the other, though the other does not imply the one. I cannot express myself distinctly, you see, but you know what I mean. I am not at all a genius, and even this happiness cannot inspire me with fine language. But what can I *do* for you?—there

is where I hope to show my sense of what I owe to you."

"First, then, we must leave this place and walk home, for I think people are looking at us," said Elsie, trying to collect her thoughts; "and then you must tell me what I am to do with Mrs. Peck, if that is her name. Mrs. Phillips calls her Mrs. Mahoney. The paper you saw in my hand, which she snatched away, was an agreement to pay a sum of money if we were put in possession of Cross Hall. If I had signed it, it would have been of no value to her; but I hesitated about it, for I did not like cheating even her, and making her risk bringing herself to justice for nothing."

"I will go to see her myself, and negotiate for you. I do not think I should have much scruple in outwitting her, for she really deserves it, and it is only letting her over reach herself. Will you give me full powers to act for you?"

"Oh, yes," said Elsie; "if she will only deal with you it will be so much better."

"Upon the footing on which we stand together at present it is quite right and proper that I should do so," said Brandon, accepting the responsibilities of his position with great satisfaction. "You did not get my letter. Emily and your sister told me you sailed before the mail came in, which contained that painful work of composition. I wrote to you whenever I got out to Barragong, and saw that I really had not been so nearly ruined as I thought. I determined to do it on the occasion when I parted with you in the nursery."

"Shall I say, like Miss Harriett Phillips, that I conquered you by making a ballad in your praise? for these men can be led by nothing so well as by vanity and selfishness. No, I will not say it, for I do not think you are either vain or selfish. I should not like you if you were," said Elsie.

"Say *love*, Alice, it sounds much sweeter, and goes more to my heart. You like your cousin, or no-cousin Francis, but you must *love* me."

"Well, love be it," said Alice; "but I really

love Francis a good deal, too—not as I love you, or as I intend to love you, for I really don't know how I feel just yet, but still not mere liking."

"I am not at all jealous," said Brandon, "though all his literary talents and tastes should make me feel my own inferiority."

"Even Jane never would allow me to say that you were inferior to Francis; she said your talents lay in a different direction. She was sorry that I refused you, and when I came to know you better I was very sorry myself."

"When did you begin to soften to me?" asked Brandon.

"When you said Peggy had taught you so much—when you expressed yourself so warmly and so truly about her."

"Had she not prejudiced you against me in the first place?" said Brandon, hesitatingly.

"Yes, she had," said Elsie, with still greater hesitation.

"By something that she said of me? It was too true I deserved it; but the lesson she

taught me has never been forgotten. I do not say that I deserve you, but I mean to try my best to deserve you. But was that your only reason for refusing me?"

"No; I had several. I thought myself a very unfit wife for you, and that you would be cruelly disappointed to get a low-spirited, sickly, useless girl who did not love or esteem you. I really thought I was dying, and it would have been wrong to have thought of marrying under such circumstances; and besides, you could not have cared much about me, or you would not have transferred your affection so easily to a woman so very different in every way."

"Well, it does appear very inconsistent," said Brandon. "When my letter is returned from England, you will see two pages of apologies, and reasons why I was so foolish; but I really thought there was somebody whom you liked better, until that very moment when I caught your eye and your expression when I praised our excellent old friend. Your glance at that time restored me to my allegiance; but the bad

news of my affairs next day put love and marriage out of my head, till I came to part from you, and I felt how hard it was. But I am glad to see that I have not seriously injured Miss Phillips by trifling with her affections. She has met with her match at last. I never thought she could have been so well suited."

"I really think they will get on very comfortably."

"How could I ever fancy that woman amiable?" said Brandon. "I thought her really an exceedingly agreeable and clever woman in Derbyshire: when I went out shopping with her on that memorably day, I saw spots on the sun; and the day before yesterday, at Wiriwilta, she appeared to be quite insufferable. I cannot think enough of my own good luck; I might have been her husband by this time instead of being your lover, which is much pleasanter. What an insipid slow life it would have been, though Grant, I dare say, looks forward to it with complacency. He always used to look down on the colonial girls that our neighbours

married, and threatened to go home for a thoroughly accomplished wife; and now one of that stamp has come out to him, and saved him time and money. And Miss Phillips looks far more kindly on him than she ever did on me."

"I do not call it merely good luck," said Elsie; "I think our affairs are in wiser hands than our own."

"And that I should be grateful for that wise guidance, instead of idly congratulating myself that things have turned out so well," said Brandon. "I only know that I feel grateful, though I am in want of words to express it. A man living alone, as I have done for so many years, feels at a loss to speak about these matters. I need a dear good woman like you by my side to teach me to open my heart, for I know I never will be ashamed to speak to you as I feel —though I might stand in some awe of a poetess, too."

"Don't speak about my poetry," said Elsie.

"Am I never to hear that song of Wiriwilta,

in which I play such a conspicuous part?" said Brandon.

"Oh, I have forgotten it, for the children got tired of it, and asked for new songs and stories; it was never written down, and I never can recollect my own verses. It shows that they are not genuine poetry, for I have a tenacious memory for anything good of other people's. So, as it is lost for ever, you may imagine it to have been as beautiful as you please."

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. PHILLIPS IS RELIEVED.

MRS. PHILLIPS had been much alarmed at the sight of Mr. Brandon almost immediately after Elsie and Mrs. Peck had gone out. He asked for Miss Alice Melville as soon as he entered, saying he had a letter from her sister and messages from the children for her, so that he would stay with Mrs. Phillips till she returned, and sat down before the window looking steadily out to catch the first sight of her. Not having her mother's inventive turn, she was at a loss how to get rid of him. Brandon must not see Mrs. Peck, and Elsie must be warned to say nothing about her to him. She sat in torture for some time, and at last in despair she asked him in an

awkward embarrassed way to be good enough to go for a nosegay for her, that she had been promised by a mutual friend at Richmond, that she wished very much to have. He could not help thinking something was wrong. Mrs. Phillips had always been very inconsiderate to Alice, and no doubt she had been sent to town on some errand that she was ashamed he should know about—probably to fetch a heavy parcel. So, instead of going to Richmond, he took the road on which he would be most likely to meet her, so as to assist her if possible, and as he came up to the square where Mrs. Peck and Elsie were talking, he met with a bush acquaintance, who, after the usual greetings to the returned Brandon, pointed to the two female figures, and remarked —"There's Mrs. Peck back again to Melbourne, and a very pretty girl with her. I wonder if she brought her from Adelaide. I thought Melbourne had lost that ornament for ever, but here she is as large as life again."

Something in the attitude and form of the girl in the distance reminded him of a person he had

seen. He was sorry for the poor thing, and walked quickly towards the place where they were standing engrossed with their important business. To his surprise and horror he found she was really the person he thought she slightly resembled, and he lost no time in coming forward to stop the conversation.

Mrs. Phillips was astonished and distressed to see Elsie return with Brandon without Mrs. Peck. Where they had met, and how they had got rid of her, she could not imagine. Elsie went to take off her bonnet and return to her work, and Mrs. Phillips was left alone with Brandon. At his first word, his first question, how could she let Alice Melville go out of her house with a woman so well known in Melbourne as Mrs. Peck, Mrs. Phillips burst into tears.

"I could not help it; indeed, I could not help it. Stanley will be so angry if you tell him, and I am sure I did all I could to keep her away, but she would come, and she would take a fancy to Alice, and sit with her, and then when

I sent Alice out for the buttons, she would go with her."

"But why have you her here at all, Mrs. Phillips?" said Brandon, gravely. "You must know that she is no fit person to be in your house, particularly in Mr. Phillips's absence. Confide in your good husband. If there is any part of your past life that you are afraid of her telling, believe me you will not better yourself by keeping in her power—tell your husband everything, and shake yourself free of this dangerous woman."

"Stanley knows everything—everything about me—but he said I never was to speak to her again; and I am sure I never wished to; but how can I help it when she will come—and she is my own mother? But don't tell anybody, for Stanley would be so vexed. I don't keep anything from him; don't blame me with that, Mr. Brandon."

"Your mother?" said Brandon. "Oh, that alters the case."

"I know that she is not good, and not re-

spectable, and all that; but she went on so that I was terrified to refuse her leave to come here to do some sewing. If Stanley had not thought she was in Adelaide, he would never have left me here. Everything goes wrong when he leaves me. There, when he went to America, we had the scarlet fever, and I lost my dear little Eva, and now there is all this trouble. Oh! I wish I had gone up to Wiriwilta—I would have done just as well there. But don't tell Mr. Phillips about this; I would rather tell him myself. He has been good to me—so very good to me;—you cannot think how good he has always been to me;—I do not keep things from him—indeed I don't, Mr. Brandon."

Brandon felt more liking to poor Mrs. Phillips in her distress and in her tears than he had ever felt before. With such a mother, and such training as she had had in her early years, much could not be expected from her, and now her expressions of gratitude to her good husband touched him greatly. He had always thought her too insensible of her extraordinary good

fortune—and in a general way, so she was; but during these last few days, seeing her mother, and shrinking from her, had made Mrs. Phillips have some idea of what her life might have been if Stanley had not been so fond of her, and so generous as to marry her, and take her away from what was likely to be her fate in such hands as those of her mother and Peck, and keep her so quiet and comfortable, and give her every luxury he could afford, and bear with her temper, her ignorance, and her stupidity; for in a vague way she knew that she had these faults. Was there ever a wish of hers that he could grant that he had refused? Even this unlucky stay in Melbourne had been at her own earnest request, and it had turned out so miserably, just because he was away. Never had she loved her husband so much as at this time when she had been displeasing him so grievously; how she had longed for courage to drive away the invader!—and now, though humbled before Mr. Brandon, she was grateful to him when she thought that he could stay with her till her

husband came, and that, so protected, her mother could not again visit her.

"No doubt Phillips will forgive you readily when you tell him the truth; and I forgive you too, under the very distressing circumstances in which Mrs. Peck placed you, though I did feel very indignant at your allowing the girl whom I love, and whom I mean to marry, to go to Melbourne with such a person," said Brandon.

"You mean to marry Alice?" said Mrs. Phillips.

"Yes, and she has consented to have me."

"Well, she is a good girl," said Mrs. Phillips, "and I am sure I wish you happy with her. I know you will get on better with her than with Harriett, for she is always so much taken up with herself, and never thinks about other people. The way she treated me when I was left here with her was shameful; but I'll not tell Stanley about it if I can help it, for I have got enough to vex him about without grumbling at his sister that he thinks so much of. But I like both of the Melvilles, and they were both very

good to my poor little baby as died in scarlet fever, you know. We'll never get a husband for Miss Melville, for the gentlemen are all frightened of her; but it is just as well, for she is a capital governess, Stanley says, and the children like her—but they like Alice best."

"And Miss Phillips and Dr. Grant appear to be making it up as fast as possible," said Brandon, "if I may judge from what I saw and heard at Wiriwilta."

"I am sure, Mr. Brandon, you never saw such goings on all the time he was in town. They were together continually, and when he left Melbourne, she said she would like to go up the country too. I really don't think Stanley would have liked it."

"Perhaps they are engaged," suggested Brandon.

"Perhaps they were; but I think Harriett would have told me that, for she'd have been so proud of it, and I really think it was my dues to hear the first thing besides."

"I have told you the first thing," said

Brandon. "I have not been more than half an hour accepted."

"Well, I am glad you have told me. I will miss Alice dreadfully, though. I suppose it will be soon?" said Mrs. Phillips.

"As soon as I can persuade her to take me for better for worse," said Brandon.

"Oh, she wont need much persuading, such a good marriage for her as it is," said Mrs. Phillips, who fancied she knew something of human nature. "Emily will want to be bridesmaid, she is so fond of both Alice and you."

"Of course she will wish it, and of course she will have her own way, as usual; but with regard to Mrs. Peck, will you or shall I tell Alice the relation between you and her? I should like you to be justified to her."

"Oh, I'll tell her: I must wish her joy, and then I will tell her. And, Mr. Brandon, will you be good enough to stay in the house as much as you can till Stanley comes down from Wiriwilta, and then you will be able to send Mrs. Peck away, for I am too frightened of her

to do it myself. I'll go and speak to Alice now."

"Do; and send her in to speak to me, for I have got some business of hers that I must attend to, and I must have some directions from her."

"Business!" said Mrs. Phillips, incredulously; "I dare say you have got plenty to say to her, but I don't think as it's business."

At the sight of Alice, Mrs. Phillips's tears burst forth afresh, and for the second time in her life (the first was on the occasion of Eva's death, when she had felt Alice so very kind), she threw her arms round one of her own sex for sympathy and consolation.

"My dear Alice, forgive me—I could not help it, I was so frightened. You must not tell anybody, not even your sister, about it; but that woman is my own mother, and I could not get her to go away. I did not like your being so much with her, but I could not help it, for she would do it. Do forgive me."

"Certainly, I forgive you from my heart," said Elsie.

"And Mr. Brandon has told me all about you and him, and I really wish you joy. You are going to have a good husband—not so good a one as mine, but still a very good one."

"Thank you, Mrs. Phillips. I hope to be able to make him happy—at least I will try my very best to do so," said Elsie.

"And you must make allowances for me, for you can see how I was brought up. I know I have been very often cross with you, but you must forgive all these old things; and I suppose it had better be before we leave Melbourne. We must write for Emily to come down, for she will want to be bridesmaid, and Mr. Brandon says she shall, and we must set to get your things all in a hurry."

"There's time enough to talk of all these matters," said Elsie. "I have scarcely begun to believe that I am engaged yet."

"Oh, but Mr. Brandon wants to speak to you on business, and what other business can there be? So go into the drawing-room, and

he will perhaps show you that there is some need to think of these things."

But Mr. Brandon did not bewilder Elsie with asking her to fix any time, though he was determined to be married before going out of town, if possible; but he had to get from her extracts from her uncle's will, which she recollected nearly word for word, and instructions as to how to proceed with Mrs. Peck; also, as much as she knew of Mr. Hogarth's letters to Madame de Véricourt, to show the relations between him and Elizabeth Ormistown, so far as she knew of them. There was also a good deal of other talk to go through on subjects personal to themselves, which they both thought exceedingly interesting, and Brandon would not believe till he looked at his watch that he had kept Mrs. Phillips out of her own drawing-room for two hours.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. PECK'S COMMUNICATION.

MRS. PECK was surprised and a little disconcerted when, on the evening of the day on which she had so nearly confided her secret to Elsie, Mr. Brandon walked into her lodgings unannounced; but she concealed her chagrin with her usual duplicity. Though she was desirous of further communication with Elsie, she preferred it to be with herself, and not through a person who had spoken so uncivilly to her.

"You did not think it worth while for me to give Miss Melville and you my address, but I see that you are making use of it without delay," said she.

"Yes, I am, for I want to know if I cannot

transact the business which I interrupted," said Brandon.

"You! No; certainly not. I only deal with principals."

"Miss Alice Melville empowers me to act for her in this matter, and this letter from her to me should satisfy you of that. It will not do for a girl to treat personally with a woman who compromises her by her company."

"Oh, is that it?" said Mrs. Peck, who disliked the exchange of a simple young girl for a man of the world in the bargain she wished to make. "Well, if I must deal with you, what do you offer?"

"If you can give the inheritance of Cross Hall to Jane and Alice Melville, a thousand pounds," said Brandon.

"Say two thousand," said Mrs. Peck; "I will not take less than that. Are you a sweetheart of that girl's—or of her sister's? If you are, you can easily see that Cross Hall is worth far more than that."

"I do not think you can give information that

will be worth the money I offer," said Brandon. "Even supposing you were married before your irregular marriage with Mr. Hogarth, you will have difficulty in proving that marriage; and after so many years spent in New South Wales and Victoria under another name, it will be almost impossible to prove your identity."

"I can prove that," said Mrs. Peck, taking out of her black bag several letters of old date, generally with remittances, signed 'H. Hogarth.' There had been an annuity paid regularly after she had gone to Australia; but the last payment had been of a large sum (1,500*l.*), which she had accepted in lieu of all future annual remittances, and that had been sent more than thirteen years before.

"I was a fool and a idiot to take the money, for it went as fast as my money always did; but Peck wanted to start in the public line, and persuaded me to ask for that sum, and then in a year and a half it was all gone, and I had no annuity to fall back on," said Mrs. Peck.

"Were you married to Peck or to Mrs. Phillips's father?" asked Brandon.

"No, not exactly married. I kept out of bigamy. I always kept that hold on Cross Hall; I would not marry any one right out, you know."

"He might have had a divorce from you," said Brandon.

"If he had known, perhaps he might; but nobody made it none of their business to tell him, and I said nothing about it."

"It is rather difficult to tell when you are speaking the truth, and when you are not," said Brandon; "but I believe that you really are Elizabeth Ormistown, and I believe also that Francis Hogarth is not the son of old Cross Hall, as you call him; but I fear you cannot prove it, and without that the information is of no use to us, and worth no money."

"If I can prove it, how much is it worth?"

"How much have you had already on the strength of it? You are first handsomely paid for the lie, and now you want to be bribed into

telling the truth. I myself think 1,000*l.* far too much, for if the case were taken to court, there would be very heavy law expenses before possession could be obtained. I offer, on Miss Melville's behalf, a thousand whenever they get the property."

"Far too little. I'll not speak a word for the chance of a sum like that; I must have 2,000*l.* What is 1,000*l.*?"

"Why, at your years, it would buy you a very handsome annuity, or you could lend it out at interest, and get ten per cent. for it, and have the principal to leave to any one you liked; or you might start in business with such a capital. Many handsome fortunes have been made in Melbourne on a smaller beginning; but if you think it insufficient, I can go away. My clients are not so very anxious about the property as to accede to such a demand as yours, and Francis Hogarth may be left in peaceable possession of the estate," said Brandon, coolly.

"He must not be left with it. I must not let him sit there in the place he ain't got no rights

to, after the way he has served me," said Mrs. Peck.

"I believe it is more a piece of spite than anything else," said Brandon. "Well, here is the agreement for the payment of a thousand pounds. Will you accept of that, or shall I go ?"

"You are too sharp with me, a great deal too sharp on a poor old woman like me, but I'll take your offer in the meantime. Miss Melville said I was to trust to her honour to pay me as much as it is worth, and if she finds out as it's worth more, I expect she'll keep that saying of hers in mind, and act accordingly."

Mrs. Peck signed the paper, and Brandon signed it also, as agent for Jane and Alice Melville.

"Now for your part of the bargain, Mrs. Peck, and stick to the truth if you can. I know that your imagination is apt to run away with you; but here it will be a disadvantage to have any flights of fancy," said Brandon.

Mrs. Peck had for more than a week thought

of nothing but this disclosure of her past life, and now that the opportunity had arrived, she really enjoyed telling it as much as if it had been wholly fictitious. It was quite as romantic as any of her fabrications, and it was a subject on which her lips had been sealed for thirty-four years, except to give vent to some occasional allusions, to Peck. It was interesting in itself, it was damaging to Francis, and it was likely to be lucrative to herself, for she hoped for a further reward from the grateful nieces, in addition to the thousand pounds which their agent offered on their behalf. She had thought a good deal over the story she had to tell, and gave a more consecutive and consistent narrative than was usual with her, for she felt the importance of making it appear to be a perfectly true story.

"Well," said she, "it's an old story and a queer one, but I do keep it in mind, and I will tell you the truth; for as you say, it is what will answer us both best. My name, as you know, was Elizabeth Ormistown, and I was born in the next county to ——shire, where Cross Hall is.

I have never seen Cross Hall myself, but I have heard of it. We had seen better days, for my father was a small shopkeeper, and my mother was a schoolmaster's daughter; but my father was the simple man, who is the beggar's brother, and he was caution or security (as they call it here) for a brother of his own, for two hundred pounds, and lost it, and then we went all down hill together. Mother was always very furious at him for his being such a fool, and even on his death-bed she never forgave him for bringing her down so low. She was very greedy of money, was mother, and never forgot any ill she had had done her. We was living in the country very poor, for I could not bear to go to service among folk that knew about us, when I fell in with a young man as I liked better than most; but as he was as poor as a rat, and only a working joiner, mother would have nothing to say to him, and she made up her mind to take me to Edinburgh, where she lived with a cousin, and I was to go to service. I had wanted to go before, but it was all mother's pride as kept me at home; I wanted

to be well dressed, as all girls do, and I liked to be seen and to be talked to. I had grown up handsome enough. You have seen Mrs. Phillips—she is the very moral of what I was, and I didn't like to be always wearing old things. And mother, she wanted Jamie Stevenson driven out of my head, so she made no objections to my going to a house where they took lodgers, mostly young men, in for the college. The work was hard, and the wages no great matter; but the chance was worth twice as much as the wages, for the lads was free-handed, particular if you would stand any daffing, as we called it then. Harry Hogarth was there the second winter I was in Edinburgh, and, though he was not like to have Cross Hall then, for he had two brothers older than him, he was just as free of his money as if he was a young laird. He had been in Paris before that, but his father had grumbled at his spending so much there, and said he must hold with Edinburgh for the future; and Harry was maybe trying to show the old man that as much might go in Auld Reekie as in France.

He was said to be the cleverest of the family, and the old man was fond of him, and proud of him too, but he was very hard to part with the gear. Harry was my favourite of all the lads in the house, for he had most fun about him, and was the softest-hearted too. The old laird changed his mind in the middle of the winter. I mind well his coming to our place one day, and he gave me a very sour look when I opened the door, as if my cap and my clothes was too good for my station, and my looks, too, maybe; but he said that Harry had better go to Paris, as his heart was set on it; and he gave Harry a sum of money that made him think his father was not long for this world, though he looked all right. So he behoved to have a splore, as they called it: he entertained all his friends at a hotel to a supper, where they had a night of it, drinking, and singing, and laughing, to bid him farewell. When he came back it was grey daylight, and I was up to my work; and when he went past me, he saw me crying, as he thought, for grief at the thought of his going away. And really I was

sorry, for I liked him the best of the lot, but my greeting was more with the thought of his giving me something handsome at parting than that he should take it up so serious. But he, in his conceit, thought I was breaking my heart for the love of him, and he tried to dry my tears. So, instead of going away that day, he stopped another week; and then when he went to Paris, I said I would go with him; and he would refuse me nothing. So we went in separate ships, and met together in Paris; and I stopped with him at his lodgings, as is common enough in that queer town; and well I liked the place, and the sights, and the presents he gave me, and the clothes I had to put on; and he was good enough to me, though he laughed at me whiles; and many a day he called me greedy, but I aye got what I wanted out of him.

"Well, we had been three months in Paris, when he got word that his eldest brother had broke his neck when he was hunting, and that his father had taken the news so sore to heart that he was ill and not like to recover, so Harry

had to go home with all speed. I would not stop in France without him, so we both came back again, and Harry went to Cross Hall and me to my mother's. I was not over willing to go to her, for I knew how angry she would be at me; but Harry said it was the best place for me for the meantime, and he promised to send me money, so that I would be no burden.

"As I dreaded, my mother was terrible angry at me; but when I told her how soft Harry was, she thought he might be brought to marry me, and she set her heart on managing that by hook or by crook. Her contrivance was, that I should pretend to be very ill, and send for him to bid me good-bye, and then she would manage the rest. So by her advice I took to my bed and coughed very bad, and she made my cheeks look deadly white, and my lips too; and when Harry came he was shocked to see me. His father was dead by this time, as well as his eldest brother, so his heart was especial soft, and he looked sore distressed at my being in such a bad way.

"'Oh! Bessie,' says he, 'what can I do for you? What can I get for you?'

"'Deed it's no much that she wants now in this world; I'm thinking we'll lose her soon,' said mother.

"'No, no,' says Harry eagerly. 'Let me feel your pulse, Bessie,' says he. Mother forgot about his being a doctor, and did not like his going about in such a skilful way; but I was so roused and excited myself that my pulse was at the gallop. 'Quick, but strong,' says he; 'not the least like death. Cheer up, Bessie,' said he, 'it's just a bad turn you've got—a chill, perhaps, but you'll very soon get over it. You ought to know that you're safe against fever at the present time.'

"'It's on her mind,' said mother. 'It's her mind as is so disturbed. She eats nothing, and she sleeps none for coughing, and takes such spasms at the heart. I know she'll never get better, and she thinks just the same; and for my part I'd rather have laid her head in the grave than let her live to be such a disgrace to us all.

To think of such a thing happening to a daughter of mine, and all through you.'

"'Well, Mrs. Ormistown, it is a pity, but it was quite as much her doing as mine, and maybe a little more,' says he, looking at me with a half-laugh; but I only sighed and groaned, and would not speak to him.

"'I'm sure, Bessie, when we were in Paris,' says he, 'you did not take it much to heart; and I'll do what I can to make you comfortable.'

"'Don't mock us with talking about comfort,' said mother, sternly. 'If Bessie did not feel her sin and her shame when she was in that sink of iniquity with you, I trust I have been able to convince her of her position since she returned to me.'

"'Indeed, Harry,' says I, 'morning, noon, and night, mother is preaching to me, and I really wish I was dead, to have a little quiet.'

"'Tut, tut,' says he, 'if you were really ill, you would not speak so briskly about dying;' and he tried to soothe me down, but I kept very sulky—but yet when he went away he did not believe there was much the matter with me.

"'We must make you really ill,' says my mother, when he was gone; so she got some stuff for me to take, and I swallowed it, and I really did think as I was dying. I never felt as bad before or since, and even mother was frightened that she had made it too strong, but she sent for Harry, and he was frightened too. She said that I had poisoned myself, and was going to die with the scorn of every one.

"'Oh, if you would but acknowledge yourself her husband, it would be enough, quite enough, to let her die with her mind easy and her name cleared,' says mother to him.

"Harry had no notion I took things so serious, but he supposed that my mother had driven me to desperation by her reproaches, so he said he would do as she wished, and mother fetched Violet Strachan, our cousin, and a woman called Wilson, from next door to be witnesses, and he said he was my husband, and I said I was his wife, in their presence. Harry thought that was enough, but mother wanted to make it surer still, for she wrote it out, and we all signed it,

and here it is." Then Mrs. Peck drew out this document from her bundle of papers.

"This is a marriage in Scotland. Without the paper it was a marriage, but mother liked to see things in black and white. Harry never could get out of it—though he said afterwards that he did not know what he was about when he signed it.

"Of course after mother had carried her point I was allowed to get well, but slowly, for the stuff had really half poisoned me. Harry was in London with his brother when my boy Frank was born; but he came to me as soon as he could, and by ill-luck it happened that the very day he came my old sweetheart Jamie Stevenson was paying me a visit, and Harry heard something that was not meant for him, and off he set without seeing me or the child either. He sent me a letter, saying I had cheated him first and last, and he would never look at me again."

"Then your boy was not Henry Hogarth's son," said Brandon, eagerly, who thought he had

got hold of the important part of the story, "but this man Stevenson's?"

"You're quite out in your guesses, Mr. Brandon, for as clever as you think yourself; it does not concern my story a bit, but I will say this, that my Frank was Harry's own son."

"Then, were you married in this irregular way to Jamie Stevenson in the first place?" said Brandon, who saw no prospect of proving the desired non-cousinship.

"No, I wasn't. But Jamie was doing better in the world then, and he was saying, thinking that I wasn't married, that for all that had come and gone, if the father would provide for the bairn any way handsome, he'd marry me yet, and I did not see much good in being the wife of a gentleman that would always be ashamed of me, and never bring me forward. Mother thought he would do that, but I knew the man better by this time. So I was telling Jamie that if I had only thought he'd have made me so good an offer I'd never have followed mother's counsel, but have taken him that I liked twice

as well as Harry; and, may be, it would have been better for me if Harry had not been so soft and mother so positive. This was what Harry Hogarth heard that angered him so terribly, and he said I had cheated him. He sent me money, but he vowed he would never look me in the face again. Well, when Frank was about fourteen months old, Harry's other brother died. There was an awful mortality in the family at that time—three within two years; and then he came in for the property. Mother was in an awful passion at my having had anything to say to Jamie, and losing hold on my rich husband through my stupidity. But I was his wife, and must be provided for at any rate. So he wanted to make terms with me, and proposed that I should go out of the country altogether—to Sydney—where he would give me a decent maintenance for myself and the child. Mother, at first, would not listen to this, and neither would I; but wanted to go to law for my rights. But when he said he would expose everything about the marriage if we did, we

gave in, and agreed to go to the ends of the earth to please him. And, after we had made up our minds to it, we rather liked the notion of getting out of Scotland. He would not trust to us going unless he saw us off; so he appointed to meet in London, where the ship was to sail from, and he would arrange all things for our going off quiet and comfortable; and then we was to part for ever. Mother, and me, and Frank, went to London, and took lodgings in a very crowded lodging-house, full of people just ready to sail for America or some other place—here to-day and away to-morrow—and there Frank fell ill. He had looked a strong enough child; but I think the stuff mother gave me had hurt him, for he had every now and then bad convulsion fits. Being used to them, we did not take much notice of them; but now, when it was of such moment to us that the child should be alive, and that his father should see him, then by ill-luck, just an hour before the time appointed for our meeting, Frank took a worse fit than ever, and died in my arms. I

was very vexed indeed, and sorry, for I liked the child, and he was a very pretty little fellow, but mother was furious.

"'It's a good hundred a year out of our pocket,' said she. 'If he had only lived to get on board, we need never have told Cross Hall about his dying afterwards—and he looked the picture of health only yesterday. I wish some one would lend us a child! Maybe the woman in the next room will. He never saw it, and he'd not know the difference between one child and another.'

"So mother went into the next room. It was let to a woman with one child, and she was to sail for America the next day to join her husband, who had written for her. She seemed to be poor, and mother had no doubt that for a pound or so she would lend us the child; but when she went into the room the mother was out, and the child was lying on the bed asleep. Mother was very quick and clever. Our boy was so changed with the convulsions that I would never have known him again; and this

boy was much the same size and age, and not very unlike him, so she slipped off the child's nightgown and put poor Frank's clothes on it, and dressed my dead child in the nightgown she took off, and put it in the bed. She would not give me time to cry, but got into a hackney coach and rode off to where we were to meet Harry. She told me afterwards that she meant to take back the woman her child, if possible; but, in case of not being able to do it, she got all our luggage which was ready packed, into the hackney coach, and paid the woman of the house all we owed her.

"When I saw Harry again he looked changed —far graver and duller. I was full of sorrow about Frank; and I cried sore when I saw his father. But then he thought I only cried, out of cunning, to get something more out of him. Harry took the child in his arms and looked at it all over. 'Poor thing,' says he—'poor thing!' and I saw a tear drop on that stranger's face. My own boy—his own boy—he had never touched, and never looked at. I was

jealous and fierce at both of them, in my grief and my rage; but mother was pleased to see him so taken up with the child, for she thought it would be all the better for us.

"'Well,' says he, 'are you ready to go on board this afternoon? for the ship will get off to night with the tide, and I will see you all right.'

"'Yes,' says mother, 'we are all ready; but we want to know what allowance you are willing to make. You must take into consideration that we are banished, and have to leave everybody we know. What will you allow for Elizabeth, and what for little Frank?'

"'I think,' said Harry, speaking slow, 'that I will arrange differently about the child. As he is my son, I think he would be better in other hands than yours. Will you leave the boy with me?'

"I was just on the point of saying it was none of mine, nor of his neither; but mother saw her own interest in this, as she did in most things, and so says she—

"'It's cruel to part Elizabeth from her child,

very cruel. Will you, that has treated her so bad, be good to the boy? Do you mean to acknowledge him?'

"Harry spoke slow again: 'I don't know if I will be good to him, but I will try. I will put him in as good hands as I can, educate him, and acknowledge him, if he deserves it; and I fear if you bring him up he is not likely to do so.'

"'It is for the child's own good, Bessie,' said mother, eagerly. 'You must sacrifice your own feeling, and leave him with his father, if he promises so fair. How are we like to get him educated where we are going? It is very hard on you, Bessie,' said mother, coaxingly.

"I stood sulky, not knowing what to do or what to say.

"'And Mr. Hogarth will no doubt consider the hardship of your case, and make it up in some other way to you,' mother went on to say.

"Henry looked up at mother very sharp, and then he looked at me. Though he did not believe in my tears, he did not like to see them,

for they reminded him of how I had served him before.

"'He is quite innocent now, poor boy, quite innocent,' said Henry; 'we must keep him so if we can,' and he offered as much to me for my life as we had expected him to give for me and the child too; and it was so tempting that we closed with it at once, for it cost me nothing to part with a baby as was not my own. I had had a mind to tell him, but then I knew how enraged he would have been at my trying it on with him. Another cheat would have driven him wild, so I bade him good-bye and the child too.

"He took us on board and we sailed that night, and I never saw him or the child again. He sent me money regular till I asked for the fifteen hundred pounds and signed a quittance for the annuity like a fool, as I told you."

CHAPTER X.

MRS. PECK'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

BRANDON had listened to this strange story of Mrs. Peck's without interrupting her. After she had concluded, he thought for a minute and then said—

"Did you ever hear if the mother of the child you stole missed it?"

"How should I hear? We sailed that day for Sydney, and we never heard nothing about it."

"What was her name?" asked Brandon.

"I don't know at all for certain: there was so many people in the house, that though she had been there three days, I had not asked nor had mother, but yet we must have heard it. I fancy

it was Jackson, or Johnson, or Jones, or it might be Brown, but it was a common name as there's no recollecting. When mother took the child first, she thought she'd never know the one from the other; but afterwards she used to say that the mother might find out the difference. Both was much of a size, and my boy was much changed."

"But," said Brandon, "there might be more or fewer teeth, or a difference in the colour and length of the hair, or in the shape of the limbs, though the features and complexion might be changed by the convulsions. Your child was probably more emaciated than the other. A mother's eye might have seen differences that you in your hurried examination did not."

"Oh, the other appeared to be teething too; but, as you say, I think it is most like she did see the difference, but being out of the country I heard nothing about it."

"When did this happen?" asked Brandon.

"Thirty-four years ago and more we sailed from London Docks for Sydney," said Mrs. Peck.

"Where did you lodge in London when this affair took place?"

"At a lodging-house in —— street, near the Docks; I think the number was 39, but I am not quite sure."

"Can you tell me the name of the ship the mother of the present proprietor of Cross Hall went to America in?" asked Brandon.

"No, but we sailed, as I told you, on the 14th May, 18—, in the 'Lysander,' and the other ship was to sail for New York on the next day."

"Are you sure this woman was going to America?"

"Yes, for the landlady told us so, and I could see when we was in her room that she was making preparations for a voyage. I think there's no doubt of that."

"Was there no mark on the child's clothes? no name on the boxes you must have seen when you were exchanging the two children?" asked Brandon.

"Not as I recollect of, nor mother either, for

we have sometimes talked over it and wondered about it. Our time was so short that we took no notice of such things."

"And how did you two precious colonists like Sydney?" asked Brandon.

"Oh, well enough. We held our heads high there, for we was free people, you know."

"Though you had both done what you deserved hanging for," said Brandon, under his breath. "Where did Phillips meet with you and your daughter?—for I suppose Mrs. Phillips is your daughter: though your first experiment in child-stealing had been so successful, it might have tempted you to another of the same kind."

"Oh, Betsy is my daughter, and an ungrateful one she is. We met with Phillips in Melbourne, just when we came first to Port Philip. Peck had run through the 1,500*l.* that we got from Cross Hall, and we was hard up and obliged to leave Sydney under a cloud; but Peck, he said, such a handsome face as she had should be a fortune to us. It's been a fortune to herself; but as for me, she never thinks of me. And

there's Frank, when I wrote to him after I had read in an old newspaper at the diggings that he had come into the estate, and asked him for a little help, he never condescended to send me an answer or to take the least notice of me that has done so much for him. If it had not been for me, where would he have been now? His mother was a poor woman. If you'd only seen the poor old night-gownd I took off of him—and there has he been educated like a gentleman, and getting Cross Hall, and being a member of Parliament too, and never to take the trouble to write me a line or to send me a penny. I said I'd be revenged on him, and so I shall."

"Well, Mrs. Peck," said Brandon, "I will just write down the particulars of this curious story, and you will sign it if you think I have put them down correctly." So with clearness and brevity Brandon sketched the facts, if facts they were, which Mrs. Peck had narrated, and then he read what he had written.

"I don't see as there's any call to put in all about how I got Harry Hogarth to marry me;

that has nothing to do with the case in hand," said Mrs. Peck.

"I think," said Brandon, "that if the young man is to lose the property through this confession, he has a right to know what sort of mother he loses with it. I think you had better sign this as it stands. I have signed something for you, and you must do the same for me."

Mrs. Peck signed her name rather reluctantly as Elizabeth Hogarth, known as Elizabeth Peck, and was proceeding to give some account of her relations with Peck of rather a romantic character. Perhaps, after so long a stretch of trying to tell the truth, she needed some relief to her imagination; but Brandon soon stopped these revelations, and sent her thoughts in quite another channel.

"Now," said he, "I believe this to be a true statement—a perfectly true statement—but it is of no use whatever to be used against Mr. Hogarth. The property was left to him by will, as distinctly as possible."

"By will!" said Mrs. Peck, looking aghast; "my newspaper said he was the heir-at-law; but

it would never have been left to him if Harry had not thought Frank was his son."

"It was left to Francis Ormistown, otherwise Hogarth, for fifteen years clerk in the Bank of Scotland," said Brandon, reading from Elsie's memorandum.

"But he is neither Ormistown nor Hogarth, nor Francis, neither," said Mrs. Peck, triumphantly. "He can claim nothing. Francis Ormistown, or Hogarth, is dead—dead thirty-four years ago: this man has no name that any one knows. I will swear that the child Harry Hogarth took out of my arms was neither his child nor mine, and that he had no right to inherit Cross Hall. The nieces must have it; they were his nearest relations. None of his brothers left no children, and the Melvilles should get the estate, and I should get my thousand pounds."

"I wish your oath was worth more," said Brandon, regretfully. "I wish you could prove what you state as a fact; but all you have told me is absolutely worthless in a court of law. You say you told a parcel of lies to one whom you

should have kept faith with, for pecuniary advantage, and now you want to contradict them in hopes of getting a thousand pounds from the Misses Melville, and in order to revenge yourself on the boy whom you so cruelly injured. I am sorry to say nobody would believe a word of this story except myself; and I do."

"But could you not look up in old newspapers to see if there was any stir made at the time about a changed child?" said Mrs. Peck, trembling with excitement and disappointment. She had been so long accustomed to look on this secret as capital to herself: her mother, and Peck, and herself had always thought that in case of Mr. Hogarth's death a good deal might be got out of the heir; and she had not parted with the certificate of her marriage, or of her child's baptismal register, in case he had left no will, and the heir-at-law had to be found. She had sent copies of these documents, very admirably executed by a Sydney friend, who had been sent across the ocean for similar instances of skill, to Mr. Hogarth, so that he did not

think she had any proof to bring forward to support her claims to be Francis' mother; but it was only recently that she had thought of making more favourable terms with regard to her other secret with the disinherited nieces than with the ungrateful heir, and their coming so near just when she was exasperated at Francis' neglect, had made her overlook the want of proof. She had now fatally injured herself with Francis, with a very faint chance of success with the Melvilles. She therefore repeated nervously, "Look over the old newspapers—the mother must have known the difference—there must have been some inquiry about it that would prove my statement, which is all true, every word of it, as I hope for salvation."

"Yes, that might be of some use; that might be seen to," said Brandon, doubtfully. "Our data are meagre enough. Your mother is dead, I suppose, and she is the only person besides yourself who knew of the crime you both committed."

"She is dead and gone a dozen years ago, and

it was her as committed the crime, as you call it, and not me. I won't answer for it to nobody."

"Well, we must make inquiry in the house, though I fear that is hopeless, and in the newspapers. If you had had the sense to have got the mother's name, we might advertise in America; but I suppose you thought then that the less you knew about it the better. Though you cannot expect the thousand pounds——"

"But you promised it," said Mrs. Peck. "I'll say nothing more, unless I can get something first. You have basely deceived me. I never heard of a more scoundrelly action than getting me to tell you all that old story, and put myself into such a wrong box, on the pretence that I was to get a thousand pounds, and now you say that what you signed is waste paper. I'll get my own statement from you back again, before you leave this," and Mrs. Peck, with eyes of fury, planted herself at the back of the door. "The next thing you'll do will be go and give information, I fancy."

"Be cool, Mrs. Peck; I do not mean to in-

jure you. As I said, though there is no chance of our depriving Mr. Hogarth of property left to him so clearly as this, I think I may take it upon me to say, as his friend——"

"His friend!" interrupted Mrs. Peck. "Oh, how you have deceived me! And you call yourself a gentleman, I suppose; and serve an old woman like that."

"Yes; as his friend," said Brandon, firmly, "I think I may say that he would be disposed to reward you, if you can prove that you are not his mother. I do not hesitate to say that he would give you five hundred pounds for such information as would hold in a court of law that he is not your son."

Mrs. Peck brightened up a little at this offer, though she could scarcely imagine any valid reason for it. "I think I could prove that; I really think I could prove that. There was my cousin that we lived with in Edinburgh, Violet Strachan, one of the witnesses to my marriage. She saw a great deal of my child, for, till we went to London, we lived in her house, and

Frank was born there. She knew that he took convulsion fits very badly, and that he had a brown mole on his shoulder that this boy cannot have. I don't know of any other birth-mark," said Mrs. Peck.

"And this woman lived in Edinburgh. Do you think she is alive? Was she older or younger than you?"

"Oh, older by ten years," said Mrs. Peck, feeling the ground give way under her. "I hope she is not dead—she lived in 57, New-street, leading down to the Canongate, up three pair of stairs; her husband was a saddler, and she kept lodgers. His name was George. He would recollect something about Frank. Peck could swear that I have told him over and over again that my boy was dead, and that the boy Cross Hall brought up was none of mine."

"But Peck's word is worth nothing," said Brandon.

"Betsy could say something of the kind. I am sure she must have heard us hint at it often, but she is not sharp. Perhaps she did not notice."

"Does no one else know anything about it?" said Brandon, in despair.

"No one;—but surely I ain't got no cause to take such blame on myself, if it was not true," said Mrs. Peck, sulkily.

"You unfortunately had a motive—two strong motives. A death-bed confession, for no hope of gain or revenge, might have carried weight —but this carries none. The only accomplice of your crime is dead. The mother from whom you stole the child is probably dead also, and at any rate gone out of England—you do not even know her name, or that of the ship she sailed in. The witness who you think could prove the non-identity of the present possessor of Cross Hall is most likely dead also, and if alive must be an old woman who has probably forgotten the trifling circumstance of the existence of a mole on a child after thirty-five years and more—and people outgrow these peculiarities. You have not the ghost of a case for the Melvilles. Hogarth might give you something for the chance that you are speaking truth, to get rid of

your claims for ever, and for the satisfaction of feeling that you are nothing to him."

"That's what I ought to have done. Peck always said I was too hasty; and his words has come true," said Mrs. Peck. "I might have got something handsome out of the heir—and but for your interference I might have got something out of the Melvilles."

"Nonsense!" said Brandon; "they have nothing to give, unless you gave the property to them; and you cannot do that."

"I'm glad you're to get nothing with your sweetheart," said Mrs. Peck, maliciously. "My daughter's maid, I suppose, is the person. Half of Cross Hall would have been a good fortune, but you're not to get it."

"You must not come to Mrs. Phillips's again. I am going to stay in the house till her husband returns, and will protect her from you," said Brandon.

"Protect her from her own mother!" said Mrs. Peck. "Let them hold their heads as high as they like, they can't get out of that. I am

her mo ther, and if I like I will publish it. Her father was a gentleman. I was in clover when I lived with him; but he married, and then he died and left no provision for us; and then I fell in with Peck, and have stuck by him ever since. He is in Adelaide now, where I wish I had stopped with him with all my heart. Do you think as Phillips would overlook this if I went back quiet, and keep sending me the poor little allowance as I need to keep soul and body together, for I'm an old woman now, and past working?"

"I do not know. I will speak to him on the subject, and will probably see you again in a few days. If you can think of any collateral evidence in the meantime, it will be as well that you tell me. In the meantime, I must go to communicate to Miss Melville what you have told me."

Elsie was sadly disappointed at the doubtful nature of the evidence which Mrs. Peck had to give. She had had such brilliant visions of the happiness which Jane and Francis might have

together if it could only be proved that they were not cousins; and she could not help seeing with Brandon that the chance of establishing it was very small. Brandon told Mrs. Phillips the reason why Mrs. Peck had so assiduously courted Elsie, and then asked if she could recollect anything which she had heard from her mother, her grandmother, or Peck, which would corroborate these unsupported statements.

"I cannot say anything—I will not say a word till Stanley comes home, and then I will tell him. He would not like my mixing myself up with her in any way when he was gone, and I never will keep anything from him," said Mrs. Phillips.

"You are quite right," said Brandon, who, nevertheless, was rather impatient for any information she might give, and thought it might be valuable, from her hesitation about the matter. He had not long to wait, however, for Mr. Phillips came down on the following day, and heard all his wife had to say and all Brandon had to say.

"You know, Brandon, that it would be hor-

rible to me to have my wife's name brought into a court of justice as the daughter of that woman—cognizant, even in a very vague way, of such a serious crime," said Mr. Phillips. "And what purpose can it serve? You can neither enrich Jane or Alice Melville by proving that the crime was committed. Mr. Hogarth is as worthy a successor as the old man could have found, and neither of the Melvilles grudges him his good fortune. Alice will be as comfortable as you can make her, and I wish you both joy from all my heart, and I believe you will be happy. Miss Melville will be as comfortable and happy as we can make her till she chooses a home for herself. Why wish to rake up old stories for no good end whatever? I dare say the story is true. I said to Hogarth when he and Miss Melville consulted me about the first letter she wrote, that for the very reason she claimed to be his mother I believed she was not. I advised him not to write to her or send her money, and requested Miss Melville never to mention her name."

"Out of consideration for you, then, he did not answer her letter, and this has been the result of it. But we have no wish to deprive him of his property; the only end we aim at is to prove that he is not Miss Melville's cousin. Alice tells me they love each other; but their marriage is forbidden by the will, unless at the sacrifice of the property, which in that case goes to some benevolent societies."

"Ah," said Phillips, thoughtfully, "in that case, if I thought Mrs. Phillips's evidence could establish it, it would perhaps be right to give it; but it cannot—I see it cannot. Mere vague hints, half recollected now that the subject has been brought prominently forward, though they may convince you and me, could not stand before a court of law. I think when you hear what Mrs. Phillips has to say you will confess that it would be wrong to put her and me to such distress, for so little good purpose I am sure Miss Melville would be the first to dissuade you from such a course. It is for the sake of our children that I am so anxious to conceal

the connection. I can trust to you and to Alice, I hope, never to mention it."

Brandon felt the justice of Mr. Phillips's reasoning, and yet was very sorry that he could not gratify his promised wife by anything satisfactory in the way of collateral evidence.

"Now, Elsie," said Brandon, who now took the privilege of love, and called her by her pet name, "what do you mean to do with this information? I think it quite useless for the end you wish to gain. Is it worth while to disturb Hogarth's mind, to lead him to make fruitless inquiries, to wear himself out in attempting to prove what I fear cannot be proved, to make him feel that he has robbed you with even less semblance of justice than before? Can you not leave him to his own life, which will be a useful and a distinguished one? Let us keep back this vexatious confession, at least till you consult Jane."

"No, no; I think as we have done everything without consulting Jane, we will make up our minds on this matter too for ourselves. I

know Jane will say with you that we should not communicate the news to Francis; for anything that appears to sacrifice herself and to save other people is what she thinks she ought to do."

"I don't think she can be very fond of Hogarth, after all."

"But she is," said Elsie, "in her own quiet, deep way. She could give her own life for his; but she could not feel that she was worth the sacrifice he offered to make."

"I feel I could throw up everything for you, Elsie," said Brandon.

"But I should not like to see you do it, so I am very glad you have not got it to do. Poor Francis!"

"Well, I suppose he will marry some one else, and she will do the same, and they will always be very excellent friends," said Brandon.

"But then the wrong is to the somebody else," said Elsie. "It seems quite wicked to think of such a thing. Can they not keep single for a purpose, as Peggy Walker did?

Francis may immerse himself in politics to his heart's content; and Jane, she will be very happy in my happiness. You must love her; you must not be jealous of her. She has been everything in the world to me—my sister, my mother, my friend; and if she cannot have a home of her own, let her always be welcome to ours."

"Always," said Brandon. "We must try to do our best to make up for what we cannot give to her. But you say that Jane would be disposed to keep back this?"

"Yes; but I will send it, and write to him besides. If I were in his circumstances I should think I had a right to know. I would rather hear the truth so far as it can be ascertained about my parentage, than have it concealed for fear of hurting my feelings. He may act upon the information as he sees fit; so I will send him a certified copy of this confession, and write him a few lines besides. I want to tell him how happy I am: he was a friend to us in our sorrows, and he ought to know when any pros-

perity, or pleasure, or happiness, comes to either of us. I must tell him I can confide in you now."

"That is a very pleasant piece of news, I am sure," said Brandon.

"Jane will write to him from Wiriwilta, but she cannot know of our engagement till too late for the mail."

"I think Jane formed a very shrewd guess as to my intentions, and, if she writes fully to Hogarth, will mention them. But, by-the-by, you must write a few lines to my mother. She will be delighted to hear this good news; and, as for Fanny, the idea that there will be some one at Barragong to take a motherly care of Edgar, and make him change his clothes when he gets wet, and see that he wears flannel in winter, will be very soothing to her maternal anxiety."

CHAPTER XI.

ELSIE MELVILLE'S LETTER.

FRANCIS HOGARTH had devoted himself to public life even more assiduously after the departure of Jane than before, and had made himself more prominent in Parliament as practice strengthened his powers of debate and study increased his stock of information. He was invaluable on a committee to those who really wanted to elicit the truth; while those who had anything to conceal dreaded his searching questions and careful weighing of conflicting testimony. His own peculiar crotchet—the reconstruction of electoral districts, so as to secure the rights of minorities—to increase the purity and diminish the expense and the bitterness of elections in the meantime,

and to pave the way for the elevation of the masses by the gradual extension of the suffrage, by securing that the new voters should not have all political power in their hands—was one that, of course, found little sympathy within the walls of Parliament.

"There never has yet been," says Mr. J. S. Mill, "among political men in England any real and serious attempt to prevent bribery, because there has been no real desire that elections should not be costly. Their costliness is an advantage to those who can afford the expense by excluding a multitude of competitors; and anything, however noxious, is cherished as having a conservative tendency if it limits the access to Parliament to rich men. This is a rooted feeling among our legislators of both political parties, and is about the only point on which I believe them to be really ill-intentioned. They care comparatively little who votes, so long as they feel assured that none but persons of their own class can be voted for. They know that they can rely on the fellow-feeling of one of their own

class with another, while the subservience of *nouveaux enrichis*, who are knocking at the door of the class, is a still surer reliance, and that nothing very democratic need be apprehended under the most democratic suffrage, as long as democratic persons can be prevented from being elected to Parliament."

But outside of the walls of the House of Commons; Francis had found many who agreed with him as to the necessity for some great change. All accounts from America, and even those from Australia, proved that the wide extension of the suffrage without some precaution to secure the minorities from extinction, tended to political degeneration, even in countries where there was great material prosperity, abundance of land, considerable advantages of education, and greater equality of condition than in Britain. The march of affairs was all steadily towards more democratic institutions, and Francis was not deceived by temporary and partial reactions. The extension of the suffrage must come, and England ought to be prepared to meet it. He

was willing to take advantage of every suggestion and every discovery that might be made; and when a scheme more comprehensive than that of Sir Rowland Hill for our first Adelaide Corporation, and incomparably better than Lord John Russell's, was first launched into the world, amid many sneers that it was utopian, crotchety, and un-English, he adopted it with an enthusiasm which he knew Jane Melville would approve of. The criticism and the ridicule only strengthened his conviction of the feasibility of the scheme, and his hopes of its success. Jane was sure to be proud if he could be the means of bringing about so great a reform. They had often talked on the subject, but had never been able to devise anything comparable to this. Mr. Sinclair, with whom the matter had been gone over most carefully, was quite as enthusiastic about it as the discoverer himself, and Francis wished more than ever that the entrance to Parliament was less expensive and less difficult, so that he might have so good a coadjutor.

Old Thomas Lowrie was dead, and Peggy and her young folks were all full of preparations for the outward voyage to Australia. Tom hoped to serve out his time to as great advantage in Melbourne as in Edinburgh; and he really was as clever and as skilful as if he had been seven instead of less than two years at the engineering. Francis had visited much at Miss Thomson's, and had seen a great deal of Mary Forrester, but not with the result that Jane had anticipated; and now, before she had made any impression on him beyond the conviction that she was an exceedingly amiable girl, the plans of the whole family were changed, and they, too, were going to Australia. As Mary had said, they had cost Aunt Margaret a great deal of money first and last. Mr. Forrester had been indolent, and perhaps unlucky; Mrs. Forrester had been occupied with the cares of a very large family, and had not the force of character of her single sister. Her eldest son had gone to Australia some time before, and though he had not made a fortune, he had done pretty well; and

he was perhaps ashamed that so much had been done for his family by his aunt and so little by himself. So he wrote advising them to come out to Melbourne, at least all but John, who was now of service to Miss Thomson; and James, if he thought his business was worth staying for. If Margaret and Mary were inclined to take situations as governesses, he had no doubt they could obtain them. Robert and Henry could work for themselves, and with his help could assist their parents to better advantage than in Scotland. The family council met on this proposal, and it was ultimately acceded to, and the family were busy with their preparations to go in the same ship as Peggy and the Lowries. It seemed to Francis as if everybody was going to Australia.

He had dined out one day, and had brushed against some of the greatest men of the age, and felt himself brightened by the collision. He sat beside the most benevolent, the most enlightened, and the most sober-minded of political economists, on the one hand; on the

other by the most brilliant of French conversationalists. He—Francis Hogarth, the obscure bank clerk, who had had no name, no position, and, he used to think, no ability—was admitted on equal footing with such men as these. He had not felt so much on the occasion of his dining with the Earl, and meeting with people there of title and political influence.

After an evening passed in conversation on the subjects which especially interested him, Francis returned to his club. He sat down before going to bed with a cigar, and took up his letters. An Australian mail was in, and a letter from Jane and from Elsie. Jane's was first taken up and read. It described her life at Wiriwilta, the house, and the scenery, so far as she could do it justice; Miss Phillips's relations with Dr. Grant, and Jane's hopes that Brandon and Elsie would come to an understanding, for his manner had been very much like that of a man in love. How cautious, yet how affectionate were her expressions to himself! How she seemed to live in others, and to care for the

happiness of every one in the world, while regardless of her own and of his.

"Ah, Jane," said he, half aloud, "how different it would be to come home, after such an evening as this, to you; to see your dear eyes brighten at the recital of all I have seen and all I have heard; to hear your beloved voice inspiring me to more exertion and more patience. After sitting through so many party debates, so much transparent self-seeking, and so much ungenerous opposition as I cannot help seeing in Parliament, how refreshing to see, among such men as I have met to-day, the pure, genuine public spirit which Jane first showed me the example of in the midst of her hardest trials. This reform does not bring personal advantage to one of these people, and yet they are as enthusiastic about it as if their lives depended on it. It may bring fame; but, as M. —— says, 'The laurels will be late, and we will have lost the care for them by the time they fall on our heads.' The pleasure is *in* the work—the disinterested work itself—as Jane used to say. There is one half the globe

between us. I cannot fancy that she is sitting over the fire thinking of me at this moment; it is morning with her; and she is up and busy. But in my business, and in my pleasure, or my trouble, she is always in the background—if not in the foreground—of my thoughts. But then she does not love me as I love her." And a long fit of silent musing, with the letter in his hand, followed these half-spoken regrets.

"But I must read Elsie's letter too; it appears to be long, and the first she has written to me — later in date than Jane's, which is posted in the country, and I suppose asking for congratulations — well, she shall have them."

As he opened the envelope, and saw the curious legal-looking document enclosed, containing the certified copy of Mrs. Peck's confession, his curiosity was strongly aroused; he read it through first with surprise and agitation. Elsie's own letter was not long; it ran as follows:—

"My dear Francis,—I enclose you this, because I think you ought to know that Mrs. Peck is not your mother. I think you must have had good parents, though you may never be able to find them out. You are still as much entitled to Cross Hall, and all that my uncle left you, for you know it was given to you because you deserved it, and I am sure that he could have found no worthier heir. I had hoped very much that the evidence would have been sufficient to prove that you are not Jane's cousin, because you might then have done as you pleased without losing the property, and the position and the opportunities you make such good use of; but I fear—and Mr. Brandon fears—that it cannot be conclusively proved. We have sent you all the information we can get from Mrs. Peck. You will observe a few additional memoranda at the end of the confession. I am quite convinced that what she says is true, for I have often remarked that you were not at all like my uncle or any of his family, and you are still more unlike Mrs. Peck. Consult your own judgment

about making inquiries; I know you will do rightly and well.

"You will be very glad to hear that I am engaged to Mr. Brandon, who has taken all the trouble about this affair, and I think elicited all that Mrs. Peck knows. It is most unfortunate that she is so little to be believed, and that she wanted to get money for her information, as well as revenge on you for not answering her letter or letters. I believe I am going to be very happy, and I only wish I could make everybody as happy as myself. Give my love to Peggy when you see her, and say that I should have liked to have been married from her house rather than from any other, but I do not think Mr. Brandon will let me wait so long. Jane will be writing you all the Wiriwilta news, and about Miss Phillips and Dr. Grant. Mrs. Phillips has been very kind to me, kinder than ever she was before; and as for Mr. Phillips, you know how good he has always been to both Jane and myself. We both like Australia, even more than we expected, and I am going to try to make a

good bush wife to one who loves me very much. He desires me to send his kindest regards to you; and believe me

"Always, your very affectionate friend,

"ELSIE MELVILLE."

"Well," said Francis, "here is one person who cares about my happiness. If I cannot prove that Jane is not my cousin, I can at least give up the property, which never would have been left to me unless Henry Hogarth had believed me to be his son. Jane must love me—her sister must know it, or she would never have written to me thus. I will have her after a time. If I can combine the public duty and the career I have entered on with happiness, so much the better; if not, farewell ambition! She cannot blame me for such a course. Henry Hogarth wronged his nieces to enrich me, supposing me to be his son: he must have supposed it, or he would not have forbidden our marriage on account of the cousinship. If I can restore it to Jane by marriage, well and good; but otherwise I

cannot keep it. To-morrow for inquiries. First, a file of the *Times* for 18—; the police reports, the coroner's inquests, the passenger-list of the Sydney ship and of the American ship, inquiries at the lodging-house near the wharf—then to Edinburgh to inquire at the house in New-street, and consult with MacFarlane and Sinclair. I surely can work through it—at least I will try."

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT CAN BE MADE OF IT?

EARLY on the following morning Francis began his researches; but the *Times* and other journals of the date Mrs. Peck mentioned, which he searched through, proved quite barren of intelligence. The passenger-lists he could not find complete anywhere; the newspapers more especially devoted to these matters contained the passenger-list of the 'Lysander' bound for Sydney, for the first and second cabin, and in the latter the names of Mrs. Ormistown and Miss E. Ormistown were mentioned; but for the American ship, in which he supposed his real mother had sailed, there was no mention of any passengers except those in the first cabin; and in all

probability, she being a poor woman, would sail in the steerage. There were also three vessels sailing for New York very close upon one another at the time, and he could not be sure in which the passage had been taken. Mrs. Peck said the ship was to sail the next day; but her own vessel had been rather hurried to go with the tide, and there was no saying whether that was the case with the American one. But in all the American ships there was no mention of the names of the fore-cabin passengers. Then the police reports gave no account of any complaint having been made about an exchanged child, and when he eagerly turned to the coroner's inquests there was nothing to be seen there either. The mother had probably been too distressed with grief to observe the substitution, or too anxious not to lose her passage to stop to make inquiries if she had had any suspicion—teething convulsions are not at all uncommon among children of that age, and a stranger in London was likely to get no redress under such circumstances, even if she had the courage to attempt it. There was so little

likely motive for any one to take away a living child and leave a dead one, that she was sure to have been laughed to scorn if she had suggested such a thing to the landlady of the house.

Francis, disappointed in the newspapers, next went to the lodging-house, but it had been pulled down and another substituted in its place, and of course no one could tell anything about the obscure woman who had kept it. A London Directory for 18— gave her name as Mrs. Martha Stubbs, which did not agree with the name which Mrs. Peck reported, which was Mrs. Dawson. This was a bad beginning to his search for corroborative evidence; but he put an advertisement in the *Times* and *Weekly Dispatch* for her under both names, in hopes that she might recollect something about a child dying in convulsions in her house, in the absence of its mother, just before a lodger left her house to go to Sydney with another child of the same sex and age. This, after a lapse of thirty-five years, was a desperate chance, but it was the only course open to Francis, and he took it.

Next he went to Edinburgh and inquired in New-street, in the old town, for the woman, Violet Strachan, who had let the lodgings where the real Francis Hogarth was born, and where the irregular marriage had also taken place. Thirty-five years in a city like Edinburgh, with an eminently migrating population, is a far more unmanageable period than in a country town, where people inhabit the same houses from one generation to another, and where, even if the persons whom you wish to discover are dead, there are neighbours who recollect about them. This second search was fruitless, so he could only advertise for Violet Strachan, and that he also did.

Next he went to his friend Sinclair, and opened his budget of news to him. Sinclair had been in America, and he might have chanced to have heard something of some one who had had a doubtful baby found dead on the bed just before its mother sailed. If this had been a sensation novel, Mr. Sinclair would have been sure to have known all about it, and have turned out to be the father or the uncle of his friend—he was of the

age to be either; but as this is not a sensation novel, he could not throw any light on the dark subject, and could only give his sympathy, and offer to take any amount of trouble on Francis's behalf. His only advice was that he should advertise in the States leading papers, if he really wanted to know, for some one who emigrated in May, 18—, in one of the three ships which had sailed about that time, who had lost a child in convulsions that might not have been her own; requiring some particulars about the age and the house at which the death was believed to have taken place.

"It is a thousand to one against your getting an answer," said Mr. Sinclair. "But what makes you so anxious to prove this? It can do no good."

"Only this, that if Jane Melville can be proved not to be my cousin, I can marry her and keep Cross Hall and my seat in Parliament. If it cannot be proved, then I must give up everything, and go to Melbourne and ask if she will have me without a penny."

"Oh, is that it?" said Sinclair. "I am the more bound to do all I can to help you. We cannot spare you from the House, nor from the country. But, after all, Hogarth, one woman is as good as another, and your career should not be lightly sacrificed."

"One woman as good as another!" exclaimed Francis.

"Not exactly so; but there are many women as good as Miss Melville. I grant that she is a fine woman, and one of excellent principles and understanding; but not just the sort of person one could go into heroics about. I do not say that as a companion and friend her place could be filled up to you by such women as Miss Crichton or any of the Jardine girls, or even by Eliza Rennie. But Mary Forrester—what do you think of Mary Forrester? You should not let such a girl leave the country. She is handsomer, younger, and every bit as good as Miss Melville."

"She is a very fine girl, no doubt, but do not speak of her in the same breath with Jane

Melville. I owe so much to Jane: if it had not been for her, I would never have been so valuable even to you."

"Well, then, let us see what is to be done to suit your wishes. Shall I go with you to MacFarlane's?"

"I will be very glad indeed of your company," said Francis.

Mr. MacFarlane was very much surprised at the strange business which had brought Hogarth from his parliamentary duties to consult him upon. He read carefully the document which Alice had forwarded, and listened to Francis's account of the inquiries he had made so unsuccessfully, before he ventured on giving any opinion.

"This is very possibly true, Mr. Hogarth," said he, at last; "indeed very probably true. I think with you that this woman, Elizabeth Ormistown, and her mother, were capable of doing anything that would bring them in money; but the secret has been kept too long—much too long. They did their work skilfully, without accom-

plices, and without leaving any traces of their proceedings. This confession is not worth the paper it is written on in a court of law, and you have failed in all your efforts to get corroborative evidence. There is no use in inquiring about Violet Strachan; she is dead three years ago. I paid her, on Hogarth's account, a small weekly sum, that she used to come to my office for to keep her from destitution, but that payment is at an end. The other witness could only prove the irregular marriage, which there is no doubt about, as Henry Hogarth owns to it in his will. The only evidence that would be worth anything is that of your real mother, and there is no saying if she is not dead too. I think the chances are that she is," said Mr. MacFarlane, turning up the annuity tables for the chances of life at the supposed age of thirty-two, which Mrs. Peck had given as the probable age of her neighbour in the lodging-house, after a period of thirty-four years. "If alive, there is no getting at her, and after all—*cui bono?*"

"I am attached—very deeply attached—to

my supposed cousin, Jane Melville. I want to be free to marry her. I am convinced that she is not my cousin, and you know the will said that it was on condition of not marrying or assisting either of my cousins that I was to hold the property. If I have convinced you of the feasibility of the case—that I am not related in the slightest degree to the Misses Melville—would not the benevolent societies to which Mr. Hogarth left his property, in case of my disobeying his injunctions, see it also?"

"One man, or one society of men, might be convinced," said Mr. MacFarlane, "and would make a compromise with you on very easy terms; but I doubt if five distinct corporations would do so."

"There is no one who has any right to object, except these societies," said Francis, "or any object in doing so."

"Those clauses forbidding marriage as a condition of inheriting property, or of receiving yearly incomes, are always mischievous," said Sinclair; "they are contrary to public morals."

"Henry Hogarth," said Mr. MacFarlane, "who was a clever man, and in some respects a wise man, did the foolishest things in important matters that ever I heard of. First, his marriage with that girl. I saw her once at the house he lodged in; and a glaikit lassie I thought her. Next, the education of his nieces, which was absolutely nonsensical; and then putting such a clause into his will, as if he meant that you should take a fancy to each other—for prohibitions of that kind just put mischief into young folks' heads."

"Then do you see the absence of family likeness that Elsie relies so much upon? You knew Elizabeth Ormistown when she was young—she saw her an old woman."

"I am no hand at likenesses," said MacFarlane, "and did not pay much attention to the girl; but I think both she and Henry were fair and low-featured, and you are dark and high-featured. But that is of no use either, as you know."

"Then, by a rigid interpretation of the will,

you think the societies would be able to dispossess me, if I married Jane, and could not prove this story of Mrs. Peck's to be true."

"I think I know it pretty well by heart, but we had better turn to it," said Mr. MacFarlane, and he looked out the document he had himself drawn out, and read it aloud to Francis and Mr. Sinclair. "Now you see that the great purpose and bent of Mr. Hogarth's will was to impoverish his nieces, to force them to act and work for themselves. Not merely marriage, but any other way of assisting them was forbidden. He certainly meant to enrich you, because he thought you deserved it, but in case of your not co-operating with him in his principal object, the property was to go away from you altogether. The Misses Melville have made their way in the world remarkably well—much better than I could have thought possible. I think he acted both cruelly and unjustly to them, but as they have so well conquered their difficulties, the matter had better be left as it is."

"Then," said Francis, "you think that even

if I had satisfactory proof from my real mother to corroborate Elizabeth Ormistown's confession, and could make it incontestably plain that I am not related to Miss Melville, so that I do not, in marrying her, marry my cousin,' it would be considered in law as invalidating my right to the property—that by doing so I am assisting Jane Melville, which was forbidden as clearly as the marriage."

"It is a very strong point. If I were the legal adviser of any one of these benevolent associations, I certainly would recommend them to contest it; at the same time, with the proof which you speak of, I would enjoy fighting it out with them. In a court of law the decision would be against you, under the most favourable circumstances; but if we took it to the Equity Courts I think your chance would be better, for there is a growing feeling there that it is not right for people to bequeath property clogged with vexatious restrictions. Yet, at the same time, all who think well of these five charitable institutions—and they are the very best-

managed of the kind in Scotland—Mr. Hogarth showed judgment in his selection—will think taking the property from a man who had, according to his own showing, no right to it, for the sake of the poor and afflicted, really a good work. Public feeling will be against you where you are not personally known."

"God knows it is not for myself that I wish to keep Cross Hall, nor yet for Jane herself," said Francis. "But my life lies out before me so clearly that at no period have I had more to give up than now."

"If you had the evidence you wish for (which I see very little chance of your getting), and married Miss Melville, then, of course, the societies would come upon you. You have got possession, you might keep them at bay for years, and in the meantime you might have interest enough with your political friends to get something good in the way of a government appointment. We hear you well spoken of in the House as a man likely to distinguish himself."

"Not in the way of getting government

appointments," said Francis—"quite in a contrary direction. But without the evidence, then, what would you advise?"

"To let the matter rest. Indeed, I think it is useless to disquiet yourself about discovering your real parents. These long-lost relations never amalgamate well. I have seen several instances of it, and they were very disappointing."

"Then," said Francis, "I suppose the only thing for me to do is to make out a deed of gift to each of these societies in the order in which Mr. Hogarth left the property to them. The personal estate I have certainly trenched upon a little, but all to the benefit of the heritable estate. Cross Hall is in better condition now than when I succeeded to it. If I have given away on the very easiest terms some of the worst land on the estate, I have improved the better, and I have spent a large sum in new cottages. I have lived within my means; even my election expenses were saved out of the current income."

"You do not mean to say," said Mr. MacFarlane, that you are going to take so wild a step as this? What good end can you secure by throwing up your handsome fortune in this way?"

"Don't propose such a thing yet; think a little, Hogarth," said Sinclair.

"I am sure the figure you are making in the House would delight my old friend Harry's heart," said Mr. MacFarlane; "just in the way he would have liked to do himself; getting in in such an honourable way too. I heard Prentice say that he never saw anything so open and above board and so pure as your canvassing. If you are not Harry's son, you deserve to be, and it is no fault of yours. You are like a chip of the old block in your ways of thinking. It is quite possible you are his son after all: this woman is not to be believed one way or another. To give up all this for the sake of a pair of grey eyes, and a pair of healthy-looking cheeks that nobody ever even thought handsome, is a young man's folly."

"Yes, and a head and a heart, and a few other things," said Francis.

"She would never be so unreasonable as to wish or expect you to do it," said Mr. Sinclair.

"She would not expect me to do it, I know. I cannot regret my career more than she will do; but I love her, and I believe she loves me; and, please God, we will begin the world together."

"I was sorry for the girls," said MacFarlane, "very sorry. You could see that when I read the will to you; but they have really done very creditably. In spite of the most absurd education in the world, one of them got a capital situation as a governess; and the other did very well indeed, I hear, at some sort of woman's work. It's the youngest that is going to be well married in Australia, and very likely the other will do the same."

"I think it is very likely she will," said Francis.

"But if she is married to some one else before you go out—they do these things very quickly

at the antipodes," said Mr. MacFarlane. "There —the first mail after their arrival, we hear of Alice Melville being engaged to be married."

"I will trust her," said Francis. "She will surely wait till she hears how I receive this news. Even at the worst I can console myself with your friend, Mr. Sinclair; she will be at hand, and that is a great matter."

"Don't give it up so rashly. I'd rather fight it out to the death than that. At any rate, you might keep possession of Cross Hall for a while till you made your way in public life," said Mr. MacFarlane.

"The plan of action I had laid out for myself was not likely to succeed for ten or twenty years, in all probability; and the lawsuit, if protracted to the utmost, would likely go against me at last —I see it would; and the only effect would be that the benevolent societies would come to the property when it had been reduced about one half by litigation. With all due respect for you personally, Mr. MacFarlane, I think money spent in law the very worst investment for all

parties concerned, and for the world in general. No, it shall be given up at once."

"But," said Sinclair, "it would be unfair to yourself to begin the world at greater disadvantage than before you were left the property."

"Yes, I think it would," said Francis. "I might represent the case to them in that light. I am satisfied with your opinion, Mr. MacFarlane; but on a question of such importance, you will, of course, have no objection to my consulting another adviser—the Lord Advocate, I think."

"Certainly, you could not have a better man," said Mr. MacFarlane.

"Give me the will or a copy to show him," said Francis. "I must make a note of the names and addresses of these societies, in case his opinion coincides with yours, for I must write to each of them to send a delegate or deputation to meet me. I should see them all at once, and explain matters to them. Rather a hard matter for a shy man like myself to bring his love affairs before five charitable associations."

"Shy!" said Sinclair. "You are as bold and frank a politician as I ever saw."

"Oh, politics are another matter; but until I met with Jane, I never had any one in whom I could confide—I never even knew the blessing of friendship before. She taught me to be frank, for she had confidence in me and felt for me. You see I am practising for the associations by speaking to two elderly gentlemen on the subject. Another lesson at the Lord Advocate's, and I hope to be equal to the emergency."

The Lord Advocate agreed in all points with Mr. MacFarlane as to the legal chances of keeping the property; and although he thought it a very quixotic thing to give it up, Francis was determined on that subject. The letters were written to the associations, and a day was appointed for his meeting a delegate from each of them, intrusted with powers to decide and act. Mr. MacFarlane wished to be present, for he had no confidence in the prudence of his client, who would be sure to show his hand to the opposing party, and let them know too soon how little

there was in it, and Francis rather reluctantly consented. In the mean time he worked off some of his excitement by visiting Peggy and the Lowries to deliver Elsie's messages. She was busy, as usual, but laid aside her work at the sight of the unexpected visitor.

"Have you any news?" said she, for I have had no letter from Miss Jean this month, and next mail I'll no be here to get it. You look as if there was good news, Mr. Hogarth."

"Good and bad," said Francis; "can you guess the good?"

"Miss Elsie and Mr. Brandon," said Peggy. "I see by your eyes I'm right."

"You are a good guesser, Peggy. She is only sorry she could not be married from your house; but she did not think Mr. Brandon would wait so long."

"Oh, I dare say no. But indeed I marvelled that he went to Australia without her, for I thought it was a thing that was to be, from the first day he spoke about her. But there's no much time lost after all. There's to be a Mrs.

Brandon at Barragong at last—and what says Miss Jean about it?"

"It is Elsie herself who writes to me that it is a settled thing, and that she hopes to be very happy, and sends you this message. But what would you say if Miss Jane were to be married herself?"

"You don't say so!" said Peggy, looking surprised and puzzled. "I never thought upon her being married. And that's the bad, is it? I wonder what man about Wiriwilta has got the presumption to even himself to her. I misdoubt she's throwing herself away, as many a sensible woman has done before her. One marriage is quite enough for me at a time."

"Perhaps it is premature in me to speak of it," said Francis, "for the Saldanha will be three months, or nearly so, on the way, and she has not been rightly asked yet."

"The Saldanha! What in the name of wonder do you mean?"

"I mean to go with you in the Saldanha, if I finish the little matter of business I have got to

do on this side of the world before she sails. But I see I must let you read my letters, so that you may judge of the news."

"It's fine big writing," said Peggy. "I hope it's easier made out than what you say," and she proceeded to read Elsie's letter and enclosure, with a running comment.

She scarcely understood the drift of the beginning of the letter, but when she came to Mr. Brandon's name she knew her ground. "Happy! she's sure to be happy! Mr. Brandon will give her all her own way, and she does not want for sense.—That's a kind message to me; but she might have been married here if Mr. Brandon had had more gumption, and asked her before he went away.—And Mrs. Phillips is more reasonable. I'd like to see her show any airs to her now, when Mr. Brandon is by; he'll let her know her place.—And they like Australia—both of them. Who, in all the world, is it Miss Jean can have taken up with?—And so that was the way Cross Hall got his bonny bargain of a wife; he was young and simple to be entrapped with

such a pair. Well, well! it was a home-coming to hear such words passing between her and an old sweetheart. I'll be bound he never wanted to see her again.—But, mercy on us! and so it was no you that was the bairn after all, Master Francis, and the old laird had really no call to care about you. But that woman should be punished. Men and women have been hanged for less guilt. I'd hurry no one into the presence of the Great Judge; but that she should be at large, boasting of her wickedness, and hoping to make siller of it, is a thing that should not be permitted."

"Then you believe this story, Peggy?" said Francis.

"What should ail me to believe it? It's all of a piece; no woman that was not as wicked as that would make up so wicked a story."

"Every one that I show the narrative to believes it, yet they all say that it would not hold in a court of justice; so I am going to give up Cross Hall to the benevolent associations, as Mr.

Hogarth made them his heirs, in case of my not obeying some of his directions, and I will then sail with you in the Saldanha, to begin the world afresh, and to ask Jane Melville to begin it with me."

Peggy made no doubt that that was the only thing Francis could do under the circumstances. She did not know the value of what he lost, she only thought of what he was likely to gain.

"Well, Mr. Francis, or whatever your name may be, if that is the marriage you spoke of, I think that news is *good* too. I'm not a woman of many words, but I think you'll never repent of this, or grieve for the loss of this world's gear; and so far as my poor judgment goes, I think Miss Jean is not the woman to say you nay;" and she shook his hand warmly, and entered into his plans for beginning life in Melbourne, as neither Sinclair nor MacFarlane had done. "There's good work to be done in Australia, Mr. Francis, and there's one there that will help you to do it. There's no doubt Providence

intends to make something of you. After all this chopping and changing, it would be a queer thing if you would not rise as high at the other end of the world as you have done in this."

CHAPTER XIII.

NOT SO BAD, AFTER ALL.

PERHAPS there never was a romantic communication made to five more prosaic-looking people than the accredited agents of the societies. Middle-aged and elderly men, who, if they ever took up a novel, skipped the love passages, and in all instances preferred to read newspapers. They were very much bewildered at the purpose of their being called together. They had thought there must have been a codicil found to the very strange will of which they had had a copy sent to their societies, as being, though in a very unlikely contingency, possibly interested, and that it was possible they were to receive a small sum *in esse*, instead of the larger one *in posse*. But

when Mr. MacFarlane produced no codicil, but read to them gravely Mrs. Peck's confession instead, and paused at the conclusion, as if he expected them to express an opinion, they looked at each other for a few seconds, unwilling to commit themselves by initiating any remark whatever. At last the boldest of the number observed that it was a strange story, which the others agreed to unanimously.

"Do you think it is true?" said Francis.

"Perhaps it is," said the director of the Blind Asylum; "there is no saying."

"Of course it does not at all invalidate Mr. Hogarth, my client's right to the estate, moveable and heritable, of the late Hogarth, of Cross Hall," said Mr. MacFarlane, "for you know that was left to him by will."

"Of course not," said the director of the Blind Asylum; "any one can see that."

"But what was the use of calling us all here," said the representative of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, "to tell us that Cross Hall left his property perhaps by a mistake? Had he claimed

as heir-of-entail or as heir-at-law the case would have been different; but it would have been our business to have found out that, or the next heir's, and certainly not the present possessor's."

"You will observe," said Francis, "that I hold the property under conditions—one is, that I shall not marry either of my cousins. If Jane Melville is not my cousin, marrying her, and restoring her to the property, which she has a better right to than I have—should not invalidate my right by this will."

"Oh, that is a very different affair," said the Deaf and Dumb delegate. "You want to marry Miss Melville, and to keep the estate too."

"Yes, if I can legally. I know that if Mr. Hogarth was alive at this day, and could see this confession, he would believe it, and he would no longer see any bar to my marriage with his niece. If he could see how well and how bravely his nieces have battled with the world he would require no further trial of their fortitude or patience."

"We would never think of disturbing you in

possession of Cross Hall, so long as you fulfil the conditions of the will," said the delegate from the Blind Asylum.

"Certainly, you need never think of it, for you cannot," said MacFarlane.

"But such a step as you contemplate is so flagrant a violation of the spirit and purport of Mr. Hogarth's will—for, right or wrong, he never meant Jane Melville to be mistress of Cross Hall—that we must claim our just rights. This confession, given with the hope of extorting money from the supposed heirs of Mr. Hogarth, is worthless, particularly considering the character of the person who makes it. I think you have no case whatever: do not you agree with me?" said the director of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum—one who took the greatest possible interest in the working and the prosperity of that charity, the funds of which were rather at a low ebb at this time. "We cannot be supposed to be actuated by selfish motives; we are perfectly disinterested trustees for great public interests; but if property is left to these institutions, we

would be wanting in our duty if we did not claim it."

The other four directors took the same view of the case. None of them would agree to leave Francis unmolested, if he took the step he meditated.

"But you observe," said Francis, "that this will has been the cause of great injustice. In the first place, Mr. Hogarth's two nieces had been brought up as his heirs, and they were left to struggle with difficulties and hardships which were harder and more severe than any man has to go through—and for which the education their uncle had given them had not made them more fitted. In the second place, he left the property to me as supposing me to be his son. If this confession is true, I am not his son; but if I marry the woman who in that case is not my cousin, you will not allow me to keep the estate for her, so I am forced to——"

"Stop, Mr. Hogarth," said Mr. MacFarlane, eagerly.

"I am forced to make a deed of gift to each

of you, as I am really in possession of the estate. I save you all the expense and trouble of litigation, and I have to begin the world again at far greater disadvantage than when I was taken from my bank-desk and my 250*l.* a year two years ago. I have acquired expensive habits; I am two years older, and I shall have a wife and probably a family to maintain."

"There is a great deal of truth in what you say," said the director of the —— Institution, for the sub-matronship of which Jane Melville had applied in vain. The other four were speechless with astonishment at the extraordinary proposition which Francis made to them. "Litigation is long and expensive. I may say, for my body of directors, that we would be very happy to give some consideration for the very handsome, the very generous, offer you make to us. It is not right to marry without being a little beforehand with the world; and it would be very unfair to accept of all you gained by the will without making a little compensation for what you have lost. Any personal property,

books, and furniture, that you would like to keep, to the value of 200*l.*, or thereabouts, and a sum of 400*l.* from each of us, I think would be fair, to give you a start in a new country. I believe Miss Melville is a very deserving lady. If it had not been for her youth we should have had her with us. I hope my friends here will agree with me that this is reasonable and just."

"You get the estate too cheap y," said Mr. MacFarlane, with warmth. "Think that Mr. Hogarth might have kept it for ever if it had not been for this romantic crotchet; think that he might marry Miss Melville, and having possession might defy you to oust him, and drag you through court after court, and run you up 10,000*l.* of costs, and after all the Chancery Courts would decide that he should keep it. Public feeling is against these restrictions, for they lead to people living *par amours* if they are forbidden to marry; and Mr. Hogarth's position and character would be all in his favour. You get property worth 50,000*l.* divided amongst you, and you offer my

client a paltry 2,000*l.* out of consideration for his generosity and forbearance."

"I am satisfied with it," said Francis; "and I think Jane will be the same."

"It *is* too little," said the director of the —— Infirmary, who had never spoken before. "We must make it 500*l.* each; and we are very much obliged to Mr. Hogarth; and we should not limit him so much with regard to the personal property. Cross Hall library was valued at more than 1,000*l.*; and as they are all such reading folk, they might take 200*l.* of books alone. Let us be liberal, and say 700*l.* for what he may like to take from Cross Hall."

"If I have any voice in the administration of the property I make over to you, I should like to have it applied specially to paying your officers better—particularly in those situations which are filled by women. I know you think it right to economize your funds; and I believe that all Scotch charities are much better managed, and much more honestly administered than those on the other side of the Tweed. But

I think you pay your surgeons and your matrons very shabbily. You say you get so many applications, that it shows you do not underpay them. But it would be much better to demand better qualifications, and to pay them more highly. Out of sixty applications for a matronship worth 30*l.* a year, there is perhaps one or two only fit for the work; and if they are fit for it, they are well worth 70*l.*," said Francis.

"We have raised *that* salary," said the director of the —— Institution.

"I am glad to hear it—very glad to hear it," said Francis.

"We will take what you say into consideration," said the director of the Deaf and Dumb Institution, who was speculating on all that could be done with a sum amounting to more than 9,000*l.*

"I object to specify sums in making the deed of gift, or I should make some special provision on that score; but the value of money changes so much that what is a fair salary in one generation is not a fair one the next, and if salaries are

fixed too high they are apt to lead to favoritism and jobbing. I dare say it would be better to trust to your own sense of honour on the matter."

"I think you may safely do so, Mr. Hogarth. With regard to the property, I suppose we should advertise it for sale and then divide the proceeds. The payments to Mr. Hogarth must be made at once, however, as I suppose he is bound for Australia," said the director of the Deaf and Dumb Asylum.

"Yes, in the first ship, in which some friends of mine are going," said Francis.

"I am sure we wish you all prosperity and all happiness in the marriage you contemplate, which has been so fortunate for those in whom we are interested," said the last speaker, and the sentiment was echoed by all the others.

"Could not you buy Cross Hall?" said Francis to Miss Thomson on the day after this matter was settled. "I should feel half my

sorrow at parting with it removed if I knew you could have it."

"No, no; I am not going to buy a property that I cannot pay for. My father did something of the kind once, and all the time he was a laird we were poor. He sold the property at a great loss, and then things looked up again with him. I'd rather be a rich farmer than a poor proprietor."

"If I could see you in possession of Cross Hall, and Mr. Sinclair in my seat in Parliament, I should really have very little to give up; but it appears I cannot. I have accepted the stewardship of Her Majesty's Chiltern Hundreds to-day, and the burghs will be declared vacant directly. But Mr. Sinclair cannot afford it; and he could not carry the election. His manner is not good enough; he does not conciliate people. If our scheme were carried there would be no fear of Sinclair getting in, for he is a man really wanted. He could get a sufficient number of votes here to carry him half in, and the remainder of the quota would be

attracted by his original genius and upright character, which he could show by his speeches and addresses; and we hope to make a seat in Parliament a much less costly affair—50*l.* or 100*l.* should cover it all. But I fear the burghs must fall back on either the Duke's nominee or the Earl's."

"Then are you more sorry to leave your people at Cross Hall, or your parliamentary duties?" said Miss Thomson.

"The people at Cross Hall I think are really in a much better position than when I came; and, perhaps, it is as well for them to be left to work out things for themselves. I have become much attached to them, but perhaps if I stayed there, they would depend too much upon me. But in Parliament, I have not yet broken ground in the work I had set myself to do: and I confess that I do regret it, both for my own sake, for the sake of my friends who depended on me, and for the sake of the dear old country itself. There may be more able men and more energetic men in Parliament; but I am sure

there are none whose heart was more in the work than mine. But that was Jane's doing. I know if she had not urged these matters on me, I would very likely have spent my life in indolent enjoyment. Without the one drop of bitter in my cup, in the sufferings of Jane and Elsie, I never could have felt the responsibilities of wealth. I should have made a fine picture-gallery at Cross Hall, and probably acquired a name as a man of good taste, but the higher objects of life would have been lost sight of."

The farewell address to his constituents was next written and read, with genuine sorrow on both sides. The farewells at Cross Hall were taken, and the establishment broke up; but Susan (the housemaid), when she heard that the master was going to Australia, with the purpose of marrying Miss Jane, begged to go with Peggy Walker's family, in hopes of being engaged in the service of the best master and the best mistress she ever saw. And her request was acceded to.

Next came the journey to London, and the

preparations for the voyage, and the hardest task of all—the parting from the friends and the objects he had so much at heart there.

He had written a full explanation of his conduct to his coadjutors in London on his resigning his seat; and, though there was no reproach, there was a great deal of regret, for there was not another man either able or willing to take the part which Francis had purposed to hold for any number of years in which he might be in Parliament.

CHAPTER XIV.

MEETING.

JANE MELVILLE was very much surprised at the extraordinary news that Elsie wrote to her with regard to Mrs. Peck's revelations to herself and Mr. Brandon. Though she was quite prepared for a very interesting letter on their own private affairs, she felt this touch her still more nearly. She was sorry that Elsie had written to Francis on the subject without consulting her, and that she had to wait a whole month before she could assure him that this confession made no difference in her feelings of regard and affection towards him, or in her pride in his career, saying that she hoped he was now satisfied that he was the son of honest and loving parents, though unknown

ones; rejoicing that he had got quit of such a mother as Mrs. Peck; and expressing the pleasure with which she read his speeches, and her interest in the objects with which he had in a measure identified himself. She tried to think that all was with them as before, and that, though no longer his cousin, she might continue to be his affectionate and sympathizing friend.

Elsie's marriage gave to her sister great and unmixed pleasure. It took place very shortly after Brandon had obtained her consent, and Emily and Jane went to Melbourne to act as bridesmaids; and Edgar, too, was needed on such an occasion as this. Although there were twenty miles between Wiriwilta and Barragong, the sisters contrived to see a good deal of each other. Mrs. Phillips was kinder and more cordial to the Melvilles than before; and now that Elsie had an ascertained position as Brandon's wife, even Miss Phillips could not condescend quite so much to her.

During Brandon's honeymoon, Dr. Grant had got matters in such excellent train that he made

his proposal in due form, and was accepted; but there could not be such promptitude in carrying it out as in Brandon's case, for he could never think of taking a lady of Miss Phillips's pretensions to Ben More without making considerable additions and improvements on it, and the masons and carpenters were very slow about their work. The pangs occasioned by delay were sweetened by frequent and long visits; and the plan of his house, and of the garden which he was laying out and planting, was constantly in the hands of the betrothed lovers for mutual suggestions and admiration. At last the day was fixed, and it was to be a very grand affair. There was to be a special licence, and she was to be married from her brother's house, as there was no English church within reasonable distance. The Lord Bishop of Melbourne was to come out to perform the ceremony, and all the neighbours from far and near were invited;—the Ballantynes and some of their town acquaintance besides. There were to be thirty-five at breakfast; and little or nothing could be had from town, so there was an

extraordinary amount of cooking going on at Wiriwilta. Mrs. Bennett, who was worth any two of the women servants in the house, was going hither and thither, and surpassing herself in her culinary successes. Emily was instructing Harriett how she was to behave on the following day as bridesmaid, for the two little girls were to support their aunt on the trying occasion; and after officiating in that capacity at the marriage of her favourites, Brandon and Alice, Emily felt quite experienced on the subject. Their dresses were very pretty; and as for Miss Phillips's, it was magnificent, for she thought, if there ever was an occasion on which one should be richly dressed, it was on an occasion like this. Mrs. Phillips had been persuaded for once to allow her sister-in-law to outshine her, at least so far as she could do so.

Jane was as busy in the kitchen as any one; when she was called away by Miss Phillips, to be consulted as to how her veil should be disposed of, for Mrs. Phillips had declined to give an opinion—and there were two modes of arranging

it that she was doubtful about. Could not Miss Melville settle that knotty point?

"I really cannot say; one seems to me to look as well as the other," said Jane.

"That is very unsatisfactory," said Harriett. "I know they are not equally becoming."

"Elsie will be here this evening," said Jane, "or early to-morrow morning; and I am sure she will be most happy to give the last touches to your dress. Her taste is good, and you know how wretched mine is."

"Well, I suppose I must trust to that; but I should prefer to have everything settled to-day, so that my mind might be quite easy. I should not like to look flurried to-morrow. I must ask Dr. Grant when he comes in. Perhaps he will give me an idea. Your sister's dress was very simple, she told me; but then the affair was so hurried—there was no time to make preparations. We have not that excuse, thanks to those tiresome tradespeople. But Alice and Brandon seem to get on pretty comfortably."

"Very happily, I think," said Jane.

"Oh, yes, he is good-natured enough, and I dare say, very kind to her, and she seems quite satisfied. But I have been just thinking how difficult it would have been for me to have been suited in such a colony as this if I had not been so fortunate as to meet with Dr. Grant. Being a professional man, he is necessarily an educated man, and you know how much that weighs with me; and he has the manners of a gentleman, which are also indispensable to my happiness in marriage. None of your rough, boorish bushmen, who can only talk of sheep and cattle, could possibly have done for me. Then, his family connections are most unexceptionable; my own relations cannot feel in any way compromised by such an alliance. The near neighbourhood (as I suppose it must be called) to Wiriwilta, and even to Barragong, makes it very pleasant. I should not have at all liked marrying to be at a distance from my brother and his family. Coming out, as I did, on their account principally, it would be dreadful for all of us if we were separated. I am sure I am quite

pleased, too, to have your sister and Brandon as neighbours. Alice looks quite a different person now she has a house of her own. I don't call her pretty—I never did; but she looks very well indeed at Barragong, and seems to get on wonderful well, considering."

"Considering what?" was about to come from Jane's lips, for she had never liked Miss Phillips's condescending way of talking about her sister; but she checked herself, for it was no use to argue with the bride on the eve of her wedding-day, and gave an indifferent and conciliatory reply; but the conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of two old friends, not any of the party invited for the morrow, but two large beautiful dogs, who ran up to Jane with the wildest expressions of canine delight.

"Oh, Nep! oh Flora!" said Jane, "where have you come from? Who can have brought you here? Poor old fellows! dear old fellows!" And the favourites from Cross Hall laid their happy heads in her lap, and rejoiced in their old mistress's caresses.

"What beauties!" said Miss Phillips; "but I do not like dogs in the drawing-room."

"I will take them out," said Jane, trembling with wonder and agitation. She went out of the room, and at the hall door, which stood (bush fashion) hospitably open, she saw Francis standing, allowing Nep and Flora, who seemed to know there was a friend in the house, to make an entrance and introduce themselves. She extended her hand, but he clasped her in his arms.

"Not farewell this time, dearest Jane. I have come for you, and I will not be refused. When we parted I said you knew I loved you, and now I believe you love me. I have given up everything—the property, the seat in Parliament; and now that I have no career to relinquish, perhaps you will acknowledge that you love me?"

"Oh, Francis, I have always loved you! but I could have lived without you all my life, if I had thought it for your good and your happiness. I could not bear to be your stumbling-block.

But is it really the case? did you believe that strange story? have you given up what you made such good use of?"

"Come out into the garden with me, and I will tell you all about it;" and Francis led Jane where they were more secure from interruption. Flora and Nep followed them in the greatest exuberance of spirits.

"I had to stay one day in Melbourne, and found that I could get a situation there as accountant in a merchant's office, at 300*l.* to begin with. I had Mr. Rennie's testimonial to speak for me. It is not so much as my 250*l.* in Edinburgh; but will you marry me on that?" said Francis.

"I would marry you on less," said Jane, "for my own part of it; but you care more for comfort and luxury than I do. If you will consent to do cheerfully without what we cannot afford, I will do my best."

"I have been roughing it a little on board ship; you may ask Peggy and Mary Forrester if I have not. But I hope to get on, for your

sake, if not for my own. I feel just like a boy again beginning the world, and feeling it is all his for the winning."

"But your plans—your ambitions—are they all given up? You know the property was really yours—as much yours without a name as with my uncle's. I am sorry you were so rash."

"No, Jane, don't be sorry; don't be anything but very glad. I never was so happy in my life. I left all my regrets on the other side of the world. Now, when I have your hand in mine, your heart in my keeping, when you have promised to give yourself to me, I will not feel that I have cause for anything but devout gratitude to our Heavenly Father, and humble but confident hope that He will bless our union. My dearest love, do look in my face and say you are happy."

"Yes, I am happy," said Jane, "very happy. Thank God for all his goodness."

"But what are we to do for a name? I ought not to be Hogarth, or Ormistown, or

Francis either. Can you give me a new name to begin our new life with?"

"I think we will still call you Francis Hogarth; it is the name I have learned to love you by, and I think if my poor dear uncle saw us now, and saw how we love each other, he would be pleased that my husband should have his name. Then you have really given up everything?" said Jane, who could not at once believe in the fact.

"To the benevolent societies. But they behaved very handsomely, and gave to me—or rather, to you—a sum of money sufficient to better our position. I have not only the 300*l.* a-year—I have 2,500*l.* besides, and a lot of things from Cross Hall to furnish a cottage with. I had to leave the horses, but I thought you and Elsie would like the dogs. Susan helped to pack the furniture; and I have brought her out to go into your service in any capacity. I suppose we can afford to keep one domestic on our small means, even in Melbourne."

"I suppose the rest of the establishment were

sorry to lose a good master," said Jane; "and the labourers, too—what about your arrangements there?"

"The cottages were built and the allotments made over securely, and I think they are the the better, and not the worse, for my two years' tenure of Cross Hall. As for the political and social reforms, I have no doubt there are five hundred men in England as good as me. Sinclair is as good an apostle of my crotchets as I could be, only he is not in the House. I will not be so insincere as to say that I did not give up my parliamentary life with the greatest regret. That really was *the* sacrifice. You must be very, very kind to me on that account; but you know that I could not, as an honest man, keep property which had been bequeathed to me under such a mistake. You would not have done it under the circumstances. I tried to save it for you, to whom it ought to have been left; but after consulting the best authorities I found I could not do so, for your uncle's will was so distinct in excluding you from any

benefit from his estate. So, Jane, you must say that you are glad. Don't look as if you were anything but my guiding-star—the life of my life—all the world to me. A hindrance, a stumbling-block! Without you I should have had no high aims, no noble ambition. If I had done little or nothing, I have learned a great deal; so

> " ' Love me for the sake of what I am,
> And not of what I do.' "

" You know that I will be only too happy to be your wife, Francis," said Jane.

" And perhaps if I get on well here I may go into political life in the colony and do the work I was sent into the world for at the other end of it. Then when are you going to give yourself to me?"

" As soon as I can possibly leave this family. We must let Mr. Phillips know immediately. How surprised Elsie will be!"

" Not so much as you are, I fancy. Bless her for writing me that letter; there is not one of yours that I prize more. But with regard to

the Phillipses, Miss Mary Forrester, I think, would be very happy to take your place; and, from all I can see of her, she will do admirably. Did you really want me to fall in love with her?"

"I wanted you to be happy, and I thought she could make you so. You do not understand how unselfish a woman's love can be. Then, if Miss Forrester can take my place here, there need be no delay."

"You make none on your part, like a good, honest girl, as you are."

"Why should I? We have loved each other for two years. Our wedding will be the simplest affair possible. Why should I pretend to wish to delay what will be my happiness as well as yours? Oh, Francis! though I could not have wished you to make the sacrifices you have made for my poor sake, yet, now that it is done, it is not a half-heart I give you. I will try to give you no cause to regret what I have cost you. Oh, how glad I am to be able to tell you frankly how dear you are to me!"

EPILOGUE.

It is Christmas-day, 186–. Jane Hogarth is busy making arrangements for a quiet family dinner party, in her pretty house, not far from Melbourne, a little annoyed because the season is so backward that no fruit is to be had for love or money; but, on the whole, certain that things will go off very well without it. Francis has succeeded very well in Victoria. His talents and industry made him very valuable to the mercantile house he went into. In the course of a few years he put his capital into it, and got a partnership, which, now that the principal was absent on a visit to England, was on equal terms. The Brandons and Hogarths

exchange Christmas visits with each other, and this year it is Jane's turn to be the entertainer, and Elsie with her husband and children have come down from the bush to have a little gaiety in Melbourne.

This occasion was one to be especially remarked on, for there was a bride to be honoured in the person of pretty Grace Forrester, whom Tom Lowrie, now a rising engineer, had succeeded in winning as his wife. All the Lowries had made good colonists; the eldest girl had married respectably; the second assisted her aunt in the shop, which she had recently enlarged and improved; but Tom's prospects were better than those of any other of the family, and fully justified Jane's hopes and expectations. There is no saying where he may stop in his colonial career. Peggy, now called Miss Walker universally, except by one or two old friends, was to accompany her nephew and his wife. Is it really Peggy whom we see at Mrs. Hogarth's door with the dress of rich black silk, destitute of crinoline, and the bonnet, in these days of tall

bonnets, flattened down in contempt of fashion, but still of excellent materials?

She is a better-looking woman in her older days than when she was younger. Brandon declares that in time she will turn out quite a beauty, and takes more interest in the caps that his wife makes as a regular thing for Peggy—four every year (nobody can make them to please her as Mrs. Brandon can do)—than in any other of her attempts at millinery.

Another member of the party was Mr. Dempster, who had just come over from Adelaide. He had been seized on by Francis, and begged to accept of a little corner of their somewhat crowded house.

There are a number of very bright faces collected round the table. How many recollections of early difficulties faithfully wrestled with and overcome, throng upon our friends at such an hour of meeting!

Peggy was disposed to improve the occasion. "Well," said she, "to think of us all being together in this way after all we've come through!

I'm not speaking of you, Mr. Dempster, for I know none of your harassments—but when I mind of the night when Miss Jean and Miss Elsie sat in my little room, so downcast, and so despairing, and I told them about all my troubles just to hearten them up a bit, and to show what God had enabled me to win through, little did I think of how the Almighty was leading us all! You mind well of how I spoke of Miss Thomson that night, and of the money she gave for my help when I was in sore straits how to provide for my bairns. And to think of my Tam being married on her niece! It's no for worms like us to be proud, but to be connected with such as Miss Thomson is a cause of thanksgiving."

"And I have had a letter from Aunt Margaret, and so has Tom," said Grace, "and she is quite pleased with our engagement. She says she knows that as Tom has raised himself so far by his own industry and abilities, helped by the education his good aunt gave to him, that there is no fear of his ever falling; and she said Tom's

letter to her is the best thing of the kind she ever read."

"Mrs. Hogarth taught him to write letters," said Peggy; "and really when he reads out anything to me that he has written, it reads like a printed book. As for Miss Thomson's own letter, it deserves to be printed in letters of gold; but mind, you young folk, not to be overmuch set up about being married, and all your friends being so satisfied. It is a great good Providence that you have happened so well; but all folk have not your good luck. You must not look down on your sister Mary—who is the best of the whole bunch of you, I reckon—because she 's six years older than you and not married yet."

"Oh, auntie!" said Grace,—"with such a maiden aunt as I have, and such a maiden aunt as Tom has, you never could dream of my looking down on old maids, or fancying I can be compared to Mary."

"Bravo! Mrs. Lowrie," said Brandon; "I wish I could find any one good enough for Miss Forrester, but I cannot."

"Mr. Sinclair cannot comprehend my going off before Mary. He says, if he does not hear news of her in two years' time, he must come to Australia for her himself," said Grace.

"There is likely to be another wedding ere long, at Wiriwilta, however," said Brandon.

"Emily," said Peggy, "Grace was getting word of it from her sister. She's young yet."

"So she is, and so is Edgar; but it is a settled thing. A year's engagement—or something of that sort. Mr. and Mrs. Phillips have consented very handsomely, but Mrs. Grant thinks that, with Emily's beauty and education (for Miss Forrester has certainly brought her on wonderfully), she should make a better marriage."

"But, for my part, Frank," said Brandon, addressing his brother-in-law, "I do like to see young people falling in love in this natural way, and willing to begin life not just as their fathers leave off. I talked to Emily like a father, and told her what she could expect with Edgar, now, and what she could not expect until they worked for it; and she gave me a kiss, and said that she

knew quite well that she could not have everything just as it was at Wiriwilta, but if there was twice as much to give up she would do it; for, as she said very charmingly, 'I am very fond of Edgar, and Edgar is very fond of me.' To see people beginning life in a love-marriage so young as the happy pair in company, or even younger, as in the case of Edgar and Emily, is very refreshing to old fogies like you and me, Frank, who began our married life a good deal on the wrong side of thirty, and whose eldest children look out for white hairs in our heads. The only consolation I have for not being happy younger is, that if I had married before I should have married some one else, and that would never have done. Elsie might have taken me a year before she did, however. I have never quite forgiven her."

"And the young people are very fond of each other," said Peggy. "All very right, but I don't like to see them make too much fuss. Tom and Grace are very ridiculous whiles."

"Well, I must say I like to see it," said

Brandon. "I quite enjoy seeing Emily stealing out with Edgar in the gloaming, and meeting him in the hall when she hears his knock, and getting into corners with him. Harriett, who has some notion what the thing means, has patience with it, but Constance, who is younger, despises all this philandering. I said to her the other day, when she was expressing her disgust at these proceedings, 'Ah, Constance! three years or so, and you will be doing just the same. I have another nephew coming out next month, and a fine fellow he is said to be. You'll be just as foolish.' 'You'll see me boiled first!' said Constance, with a vehemence which startled her aunt Harriett, and brought down a serious rebuke, though she herself thought the young people rather ridiculous, to use Peggy's phrase. But I know very well that one great reason for Emily's fancy for Edgar is her wish to call Elsie and myself aunt and uncle. I think it likely that that weighed with you, Mrs. Lowrie."

"None of your nonsense, Mr. Brandon," said Peggy. "Who would care to be connected with

an old woman like me?" and yet she was pleased with Brandon's remark, notwithstanding.

"Well, joking apart, I think it is really a great thing for a girl to marry into a family where they are prepared to love her, and to put the most charitable construction on all she does and all she does not do," said Brandon.

"But, Mr. Hogarth," said Mr. Dempster, "you promised at this family party to tell me the whole story of which I have got some separate threads. You recollect that we had some curious revelations one evening at a *séance* at my house in London. Shortly after I returned to Adelaide, I met in a wayside inn an old woman whom I took to be your mother, who entered into conversation with me; but as the spiritual directions had been to have nothing to do with her, I did not inquire sufficiently to get much information from her. Some time after that, I heard of your giving up your property in Scotland, sailing for Australia, marrying your cousin, and settling here; but what connection these three things have with each other, I

never knew. Will you be good enough to explain?"

"The spirit was in the wrong on that occasion in two important particulars. The letter I had in my pocket was from Mrs. Peck, but she was not my mother; Mr. Hogarth was not my father," said Francis.

"Not your mother! not your father!" said Mr. Dempster; "can you prove that?"

"No; but I am quite convinced of it," said Francis.

"I would believe the spirits always, if I had no positive proof to the contrary," said Mr. Dempster.

"Mrs. Peck confessed to Brandon that as her own child died suddenly she had picked up another, with the view of imposing on Mr. Hogarth and getting a handsome allowance from him; but when he saw me he preferred keeping me out of her hands, and educated me, but never loved me," said Francis.

"I would not believe that woman on her oath," said Mr. Dempster; "and I know her

motive. She wanted to get something out of your cousins, and for that purpose invented this confession. That would never shake my belief in the spirits. Look at the way in which those names were spelled out—you were convinced of the truth of it at the time."

"My dear sir," said Francis, "I certainly heard and saw a great many things which I could not explain. They seemed to echo my own thoughts marvellously correctly, but whenever I was at fault, they, too, were misinformed. Elsie had been suspicious beforehand that I was not Henry Hogarth's son. Mrs. Peck's confession was consistent and probable; she stuck to it as being true, to her dying day. I went to see her on her death-bed, and she declared that, as she hoped for forgiveness, I was not her child or Mr. Hogarth's; so that, though I never got any clue to my real parents—for she did not know my name, and the advertisements which I put into American papers were never answered—thirty-five years being a lapse of time in which such matters cannot be traced—I am

morally certain that I am not Jane's cousin, and consequently that the spirit was wrong. It might be mesmerism, or extraordinary quickness of sight; for though I tried to pass over the letters which spelled out the names, a very practised eye might observe an infinitesimal hesitation over the particular letter;—but of one thing I am certain, that if Henry Hogarth had been there in the spirit, he would have been able to tell me both that he was not my father, and also whose son I really was, which information I wished to obtain."

"But did not the spirit say you were to have happiness after a time," said Mr. Dempster, triumphantly, "and have you not got it?"

"Certainly I have; and if it had any hand in bringing it about I am very grateful to it," said Francis, looking at his wife with pride and pleasure; "but I think we owe our happiness very much to each other. The will, which was as unjust and absurd a one as could have been made, indirectly did us service. I am quite sure that but for the singular relations in which

I was placed I never could have known Jane, and could not have loved her."

"If Elsie had been left 20,000*l.* I never should have dared to have looked up to her," said Brandon; "and what a loss that would have been to her, not to speak of myself! It is a hundred chances to one against two heiresses getting two such good husbands, and keeping all such capital friends as we do."

"It is quite true," said Jane; "my uncle's will has resulted in more happiness than even he could have hoped for."

"Though he certainly would not have contemplated with equanimity the passing of Cross Hall into the hands of Mrs. William Dalzell, whose trustees invested her fortune in it when it was sold by the benevolent societies to whom I relinquished the inheritance," said Francis. "Dalzell does not make so bad a landlord as we expected, particularly as he has not much in his power. The proceeds of the sale are doing good to the sick and afflicted, while we are quite as comfortable without it."

"I cannot think enough of the Providence that has made good come out of evil," said Jane. "But with regard to the rappings, Mr. Dempster, the oracular sentences that all would be well in the end, and that Francis should be happy after a time, were of the vaguest description, while on positive matters they were decidedly misinformed."

"It might have been a lying or mocking spirit," said Mr. Dempster; "my faith in the truth of these manifestations is not to be shaken by what you say."

"I wonder if your spirits could tell us if Grant is in for ——, and his majority? The election must have taken place, but no one in the room knows of it; that would be a crucial test, as Jane calls it," said Brandon.

"In such a company of unbelievers," said Mr. Dempster, "we could not get up a *séance*, and what is more, we have no medium."

"It is well that Grant goes out of his own district," said Brandon, "for he would not stand a chance there; and now he is promising

to those strangers anything and everything. With all Grant's aristocratic feelings, and his wife's too, which are still stronger, their desire that he should have a seat in the Assembly, now that McIntyre is in, seems to drag him into as low depths as any one. I cannot see why they should be so anxious about it, unless it is that, since they cannot afford to go home, they want to take as good a position here as any of their neighbours. Grant's affairs will suffer if he has to be so much in Melbourne, and at best he will make a very fourth-rate legislator."

"I think he is naturally 'indifferent honest,'" said Francis. "At least, he is disposed to be honest, but canvassing is very different work here as well as in Britain."

"You should really get into our Assembly, Frank," said Brandon, "to give the natives here the benefit of your experience. How great you would be on a point of order or a question of privilege!"

"I wish Francis had time to give to parliamentary duties," said Jane. "I live in hopes

that when Mr. —— returns, he may try his fortune in the political world here. If representative assemblies would limit themselves to what really concerns such bodies, it would not be so heavy a tax upon people in business to give their time to the public; but they will meddle with things that ought to be let alone, and endless floods of talk on such matters take up much valuable time."

"Then Mr. Hogarth's public spirit has not been gently smothered by a happy marriage and a fine family of children? That is the modern view of the case," said Mr. Dempster. "Nothing great is done by married men, unless they are unhappily mated."

"A most ignoble view of a wife's duties," said Jane.

"My wife would never smother any public spirit I may have," said Francis. "She had too much to do with the birth of it, not to cherish it as fondly as any of her other babies; but I fear that, till my friend Mr. Hare's scheme is carried, I could not get a majority in Vic-

toria. We want the reform very much here, and in all the colonies; and as yet, it has been failure, failure, failure."

"And if such men as you do not get in, Frank, it will never be carried. Grant is stupid—thoroughly stupid. I talked to him for four mortal hours on the subject, and made it plain to the meanest capacity, that though we wanted a representation of minorities, the minority in the House would faithfully represent the minority out of doors, and not be able to defeat the majorities, as he was convinced it would do. I put it down in black and white—proved it with figures. Elsie and I made fancy voting-papers, and I acted as returning officer, and showed the thing as clear as day; but though he drank a bottle and a half of sherry during the process, he was just as wise at the end as at the beginning. Now I don't call myself at all clever, but when Frank explained the method of voting to me, I saw it all in a minute —and you, Tom—did not you, too? but then you are rather a genius."

"It is as plain as a pikestaff," said Tom Lowrie.

"Walter thinks, because he has not read very much, that we must think him stupid," said Elsie, "when he really has the quickest apprehension of all sorts of things."

"Dr. Grant will, perhaps, take up the meaning of Hare's scheme when the newspapers have advocated it for years, and it has been familiar to all the people around him," said Francis, "or he may vote for it without understanding it, when it becomes a popular cry."

"But to have to stir such a dish of skimmed milk to honourable action!" said Brandon. "Frank, you really must stand for our district. I fancy McIntyre will go home by the time your partner comes back, so we will have a vacancy. I will canvass for you, and so will Edgar. It would be a credit to us to have a real British M.P. as our representative, and then you could push your grand idea, as you intended to have done in England, before love routed ambition. As you say, the result has

hitherto been a failure in the colonies, but the contest should not be abandoned."

"I hear that the movement makes slow progress in Britain," said Francis, "but still it makes progress. It is too great a change there, and there are so many vested interests which consider such a reform would interfere with their prescriptive rights. On the Continent it makes more way; and, perhaps, as my French friends say, the discovery may be first carried into practice there; but I had hopes of its success in the colonies. There is so much less to disturb here that a change from exclusively local to general elections would not be difficult, if we could only make the idea familiar. All we see in America, all we see in political matters here, only show how much easier it is to reform before abuses go too far. I should very much like to try your district, Brandon, and will be very glad of your services when the time comes; and so I should feel that my work had been postponed, but not altogether given up."

"If we could carry the measure by a *coup de main* in any one of the colonies, and bring it into working, the whole world would be the better for it," said Brandon.

"There can be no carrying it by a *coup de main*," said Francis. "Every inch of the ground must be fought here, as in Britain, but the extent of ground is shorter."

"I have grown much more patriotic since I was married," said Brandon. "The place where you have a real home—the birthplace of your children—and where you hope to see them grow up—becomes very dear to you. And here are the youngsters!"

Little Maggie Brandon (so called in compliment to Peggy) seemed to know by intuition that there was something for her in the pocket of the worthy woman, and went to her at once; and the others distributed themselves according to their several likings.

"Well," said Peggy, "I've often thought to ask you before, Mrs. Hogarth, but how are you going to educate your lassies? What are you

going to do with them? and you favour lassies in both families—two to one in each of them."

"Very much as we were educated ourselves," said Jane; "with more care taken for the cultivation of their natural tastes, but the groundwork will be the same."

"That education has certainly turned out dmirable wives," said Francis.

"Speak for yourself, Frank," said Brandon; "but my wife spoils me, and everybody in the house. There is a sad want of vinegar in her composition. She cannot scold her servants—the mildest approach to it that she ever makes is by saying, 'Mr. Brandon does not like such a thing,' or that 'Mr. Brandon would be displeased if they do not attend to such another.' The idea of making a bugbear of me is very ingenious, but I fear not very efficacious, for I know they see through it. As for me, a penitent recollection of a conversation in an English railway carriage has stopped her mouth for ever, and she never gives me a hard word, however I

may deserve it; and for the children, the less we say of them the better."

"But, Walter, I can keep my servants, and they really do very well; and the children are good enough, and so are you; so there is no need to scold."

"That is where the dangerous part of this subtle flattery lies; it is so perfectly sincere. But I suppose we get along pretty well, considering, as Mrs. Grant would say; and I really think her household would be more comfortable if she took a leaf out of my wife's book. Her servants will not stay three months with her, and she has three of the most spoiled, exacting children I ever saw—far worse than their cousins at Wiriwilta were in their worst days. The Phillipses had spirit, but the Grants have none, except perhaps the spirit of discontent. I think we might do worse, Peggy, than educate our girls to resemble their mothers."

"But," said Jane, "we must make some provision for them also, if we can. I suppose that

I could have got on as well as you, Francis, if I had been a man."

"Yes, there is nothing I have done that you could not have done as well. I have as much perseverance as you, but not so much energy. It is likely you would have made a better figure in the world than I have done."

"But I could get nothing to do but to take a governess's situation; and wonderfully lucky I was to get it. Mary Forrester is a much better governess for Mr. Phillips's family than I was. Elsie could only maintain herself as a milliner or as a lady's maid; and yet Elsie, placed as a clerk or bookkeeper in a bank or merchant's office, would have filled the situation as satisfactorily as half the young men I know."

"Then you have not quite given up your notions of woman's rights?" said Mr. Dempster. "For my part, I think the best right a woman has is the right to a husband."

"That is a right she cannot assert for herself," said Jane, smiling. "One would think,

to hear people talk on this subject, that the entreaties for work and independence come from those who in their youth disdained faithful lovers, and perversely and unnaturally refused to love, honour, and obey. I think, on the contrary, that the women of our century are only too easily won, and cannot be charged with any unnecessary cruelty to lovers. I do not think that you increase the number of happy marriages or lessen the number of mercenary unions by making the task for a single woman to maintain herself honestly and usefully such very uphill work.

THE END.

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